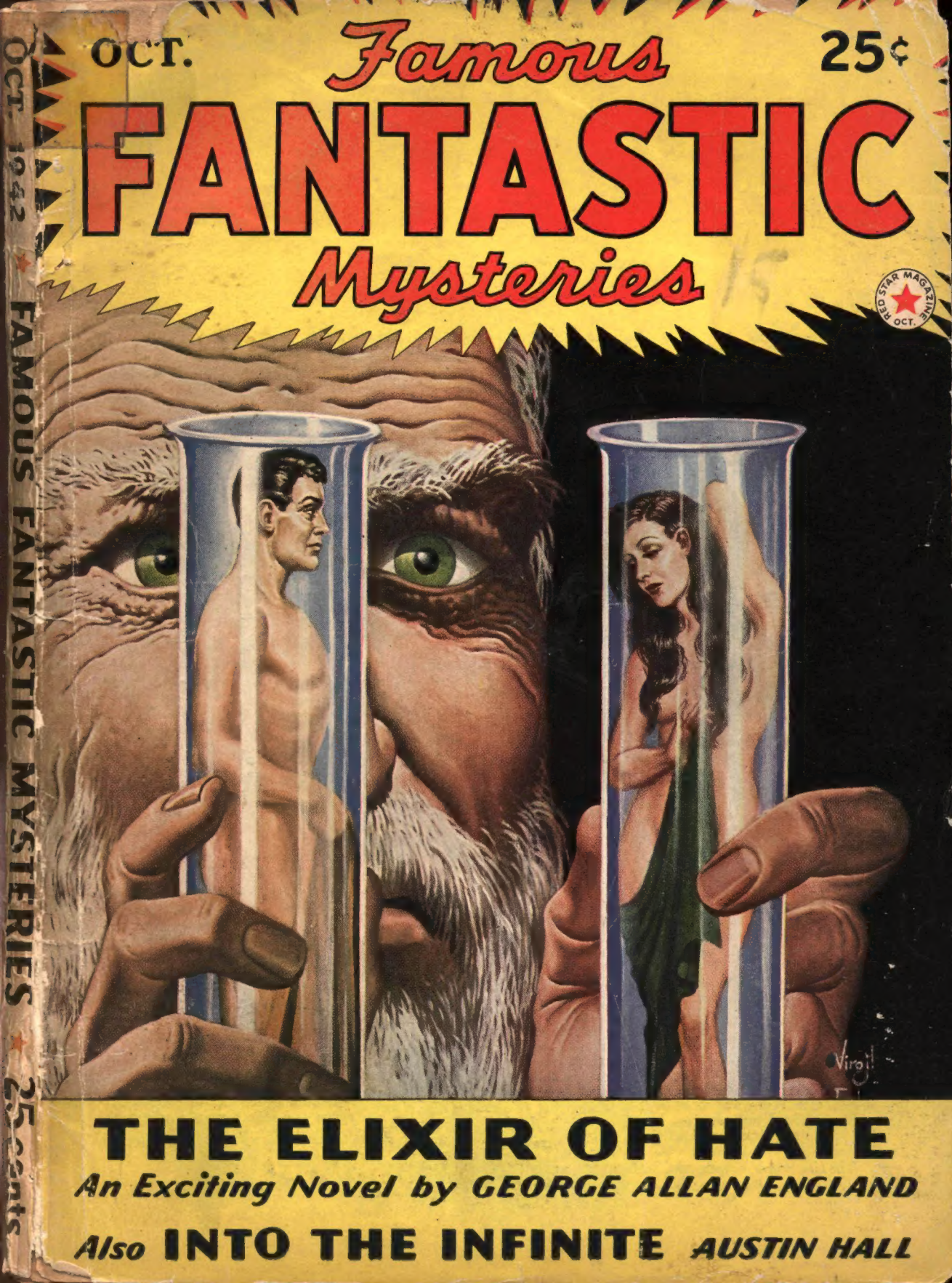
OCT.
Famous
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OCT. 1942 ★ FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES ★ 25 cents
THE ELIXIR OF HATE
An Exciting Novel by GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND
Also INTO THE INFINITE AUSTIN HALL

BOB WAS FOOLED . . . he thought he could get rid of those distressing flakes and scales with one application of some overnight remedy. He found, however, that it required persistent treatment, and used Listerine Antiseptic and massage twice daily to fight the condition. Now his scalp feels "like a million."

AND SO WAS MRS. K . . . she had blamed her itching, irritated scalp on reducing and changed her diet. Then an advertisement suggested that the condition might be the infectious type of dandruff. "It's simply wonderful," she says, "how Listerine Antiseptic and massage helped me."

ITCHY SCALP?...TELL-TALE FLAKES?...UGLY SCALES?

IT MAY BE *INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF!*

AND in the infectious type of dandruff millions of germs are active on your scalp. Now, isn't it sensible to fight an infection with a treatment that *kills germs?* Listerine Antiseptic and massage, the *tested* treatment, does just that—and often brings wonderful improvement! When you massage Listerine onto your scalp, millions of germs associated with infectious dandruff are literally "blitzed" to death.

Kills "Bottle Bacillus"

Even large numbers of *Pityrosporum ovale*, the stubborn "bottle bacillus" which many leading authorities recognize as a causative agent of infectious dandruff, are destroyed by Listerine's quick, germ-killing action!

The Listerine Antiseptic treatment is simple, easy, delightful. It gives your scalp and hair a cooling antiseptic bath . . . and here's what happens, as shown by a large majority of clinical test cases: **1.** Loosened, ugly flakes and scales begin to disappear. **2.** Itching and irritation are relieved. **3.** Inflammation is allayed. **4.** Your scalp feels healthier, your hair looks cleaner.

76% Improved in Clinical Tests

We said that Listerine was tested. That's under-statement. Listerine Antiseptic was tested under exacting scientific supervision. Listerine was tested under severe clinical conditions. *And, in a series of clinical tests, 76% of the dandruff sufferers who used Listerine and massage twice a day showed complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms within a month!*

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So don't delay. Neglect may aggravate the trouble. Start in today with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. It has helped so many others, it may help you. Remember—Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

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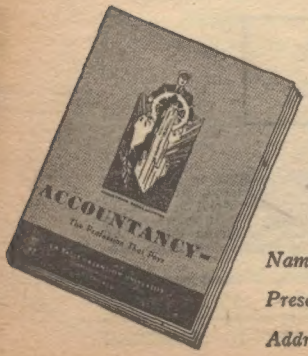

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(Combined with Fantastic Novels Magazine)

Vol. IV OCTOBER, 1942 No. 6

Complete Book-Length Novel

The Elixir of Hate — **George Allan England** — 6

The Alkahest. Great secret of Eternal Youth!! With a month to live, Dr. Granville Dennison rushed headlong to obtain the precious formula, heedless of all warnings

Published serially in Cavalier, August, 1911

Serial

Into the Infinite — **Austin Hall** — 83

He was the Superman—The Rebel Soul. Transcendent in beauty and power, he could tear down the world, or lead it to salvation.

A liberal instalment of a book-length novel which had its inception in that fascinating masterpiece, "The Rebel Soul"

Published serially in All-Story Weekly, April 12, 1919

Feature

The Readers' Viewpoint — 139

This magazine is published once a month. The November issue will be on sale Sept. 15.

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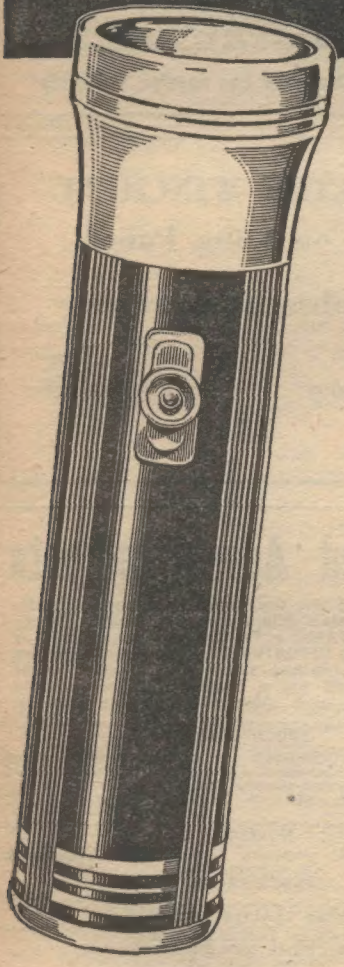

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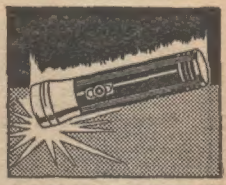

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FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER . . .
Look for the DATE-LINE

Says Everybody is HYPNOTIZED

A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report relief of long standing illness. Others acquire superb bodily strength and vitality, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

The method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western world.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, from conquest of sickness to the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized, our powers put to sleep by the suggestions of associates, by what we read, and by various experiences. To realize their really marvelous powers, men and women must escape from this hypnotism. The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing the mind of the hypnotizing ideas that paralyze the giant powers within us.

A nine-thousand word treatise, revealing the startling results of this system, is now being offered free to anyone who quickly sends his name and address. Write promptly to the address below, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

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An absorbing article

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U. S. Stamps wanted at 90% of Face Value. Money Order, check or cash sent on receipt. Send Stamps Registered Mail.
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Send for FREE CIRCULAR of PHOTOSTAMPS. Your favorite picture on stamp at 1c each in lots of 100. *Agents Wanted.*
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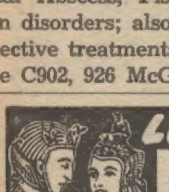

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Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay.

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Radio factories are receiving millions of dollars in Government Orders. The 882 Broadcasting Stations employ thousands of Radio Technicians and Operators. The Radio repair business is booming due to shortage of new home and auto Radio sets. Many Radio Technicians have their own spare or full time Radio business. Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio, Public Address Systems are other growing fields. Television will bring future opportunities.

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The Elixir of Hate

A Complete Novel

By George Allan England

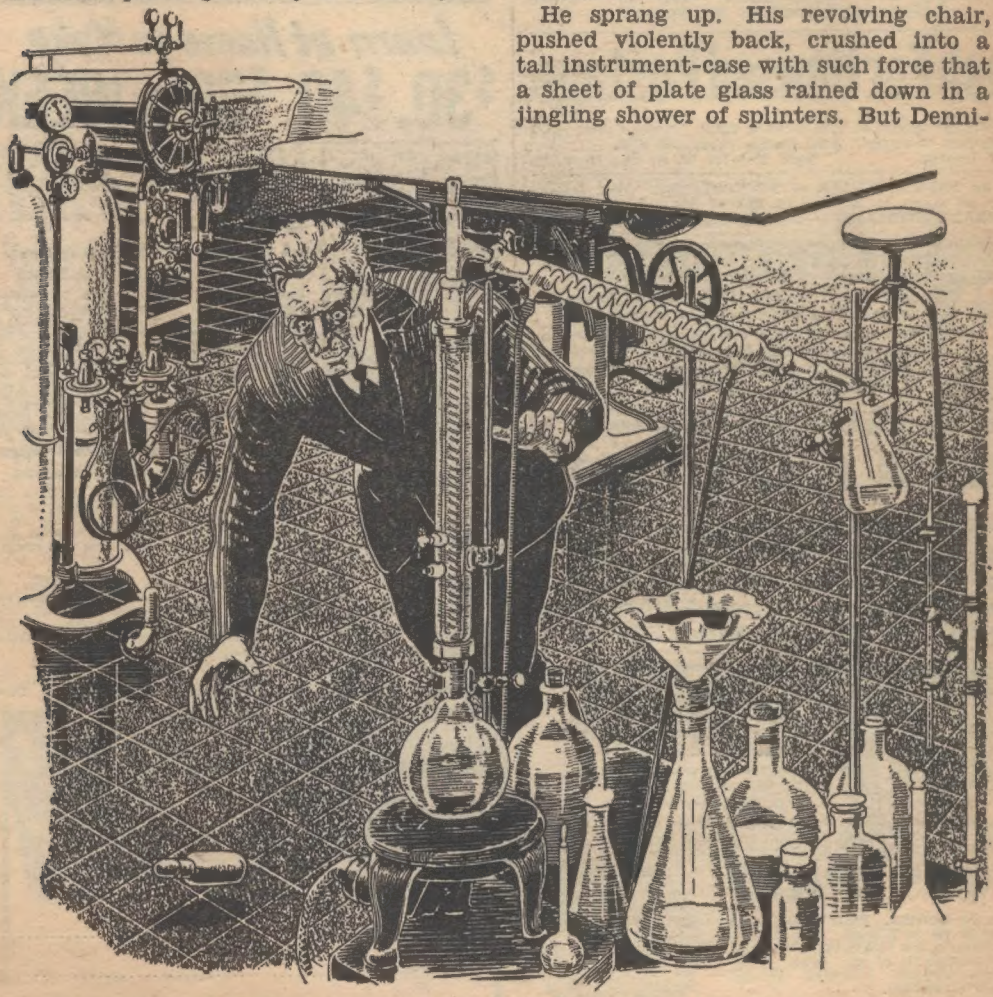
CHAPTER I

THE MESSAGE

THE letter was short—only half a page of typewriting—but as Dr. Granville Dennison finished it, an extraordinary change came over his face. His usual pallor gave way to a more yellowish hue; his jaw dropped; and, as he sat there at his desk, staring for a moment at the paper which shook in his trembling hand, the wrinkles drew tense across his forehead and his withered cheeks.

"What?" he gulped, rereading the lines which seemed to dance before his eyes. "Witham—*knows?"*

He sprang up. His revolving chair, pushed violently back, crushed into a tall instrument-case with such force that a sheet of plate glass rained down in a jingling shower of splinters. But Denni-



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The gripping story of a man who dared to snatch youth from Destiny's unwilling hand

As the patriarch sprawled helplessly amid a crashing wreck of apparatus, Dennison sprang toward the precious flask he had struck from the savant's hand

son paid no attention. Unminding the destruction, indifferent to the rest of his mail, despite the fact that a couple of special-delivery letters lay among the others, the doctor fell to pacing the office floor. He shook as with an ague. A fine sweat began to bead his forehead. He stopped, once more read the letter; then, with a sudden determination, snatched up his telephone book and began violently ruffing the pages in quest of a number.

"M—Med—Mediterranean! Ah, here it is!" he cried, slapping the book down on the desk.

As he feverishly made his phone connection there came a sharp knocking at the office door. Dennison paid no heed. The knocking grew louder, more insistent.

"Well?" he shouted.

"Mr. Lamson's here," the voice of Edwards, his assistant, penetrated to him.

"Can't see him!"

"But—he's worse. Heart, you know. And—"

"No use! Tell him to come around tomorrow, or—no, no, I shan't be—hello? Hello? Mediterranean Transport Line?"

"....."

"All right! Tell me, when's your next boat to Marseilles?"

"....."

"What? This morning? La Toulouse? Reserve me an outside room, at once. Name is—"

"....."

"All engaged? No room? Say *I'm going,* anyhow! And—"

"....."

"No time? She sails at eleven? But, for the love of Heaven! That's only fifteen minutes!"

Down crashed the receiver. A moment the doctor stood there, gathering himself together for the most strenuous exertion of his life.

Then, paying absolutely no heed whatever to the continued banging on the door, or to the entreaties of his assistant, he set to work with a dumb, desperate haste. Astonishingly agile he seemed for a man of five-and fifty years.

ONE after another he jerked open his desk-drawers. From the first he extracted a bundle of papers, clippings and the like, secured by a rubber-band. The next yielded nothing. The third he pawed over hastily, and snatched from it a cash-box of japanned metal.

He wheeled about, seized his medicine-case and, unheeding broken vials, ripped the whole interior arrangements clean out of it—all the rows and rows of bottles went by the board.

"Queer sort of valise," he exclaimed, flinging the papers and the cash-box into it, "but in a pinch. . . ."

The telephone rang sharply. Some patient or other, somewhere in the city, was suffering, dying perhaps; somebody needed him; life and death maybe were at issue. Dennison gave no attention.

He flung himself into his overcoat, clapped his hat on his head and then seized the bag.

"Now, then!" he cried.

An idea struck him.

"Oh, that letter!" he ejaculated. "Got to have *that,* anyhow!"

With feverish haste he flung aside the litter on the desk-top, found the letter and thrust it into his pocket. Then without another word he ran to the door, unlocked it and started at a run through the outer office.

Edwards tried to intercept him. Mr. Lamson, too, and the patient, very pale and wan, rose as though to speak, but Dr. Dennison evaded both.

"Impossible!" he shouted. "Urgent business!" You, Edwards, take all practice till I return! No address!

"Pier 57, North River!" he told the taxi driver. "Twenty-five dollars if you make it in ten minutes! La Toulouse! Understand?"

Thereafter came a period blurred and vague, of daring and illegal driving, until the machine swept down the pier.

Dr. Dennison flung back a little wad of bills, which he had made ready during the furious race against time. The chauffeur leaped for his prize. At the same instant the doctor found himself headed off.

Before him, to his unspeakable anguish, he discovered an impassable wooden barrier—a sort of high fence on standards, along which a curious crowd had gathered. At a glance, despite his extreme excitement, he realized the futility of trying to clamber over this and storm the gangplank, which had already risen above his head.

"Great Heavens! What—what can I do?" he panted, glaring this way, then that, with eyes that blinked strangely wild behind his heavy spectacles. Appeals, he knew, would prove entirely useless.

"Ah!" And he made a quick run toward an open door which led out of the pier onto a runway.

Through this door he had caught a glimpse of the huge black bulk of the liner. He saw it steadily drawing past the doorway. A port-hole came to view, round and brass-rimmed; before it vanished, the doctor was out on the narrow runway.

UNOBSERVED in the noisy tumult, in the half-dark of the enormous shed, he threaded his way quickly among the high-piled cases. He stood, free and so far triumphant, not two feet from the smooth, slow-moving iron skin of the leviathan.

Far above him, along the rails, which

were white with fluttering kerchiefs, vociferous folk were shouting platitudes at equally banal folk upon the pier-head. The doctor cursed them hotly in his heart. *They,* aboard, faced no such problem as his! Here was he, almost an old man, comparatively feeble and spent with the excitements of the past quarter-hour, facing the task of boarding a liner already under way—ticketless and unbooked—against all rules and regulations. Small wonder that for a moment he stood clutching his medicine-chest, unnerved and despairing.

But it was only for a moment. Then his will and his inflexible determination reasserted themselves.

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed. He beheld sliding toward him a great open freightport, yawning black in the vessel's side. This port had not yet been closed by its sliding iron plate. At each side a double length of chain hung down.

Calculating with a cool eye, Dennison judged that by making a leap he could lay hold of one of these chains. Black and greasy they were; and right above the boiling swirl of brine that surged among the piles.

But the doctor did not hesitate. For now the forward chain was moving directly toward him, not more than ten feet away and perhaps five out from the string-piece.

He stepped upon that beam. Carefully, as though judging where to make the first cut in a delicate operation, he gaged the space.

Then he flung the hand-bag. Fair through the port it hurtled; it vanished in the black of the hold.

"Now!" cried Dennison. He leaped. Nerved with the strength of a savage resolve, he made the distance.

His hands caught the chain. They held. For a second, they slipped a little on the oily links; but like forceps they grappled and held fast.

Summoning all his power, he drew himself up, grasped the edge of the port, and—now realizing that excitement had burst forth above him, that there were cries and shouts and wild, profane commands—managed to struggle through the gaping aperture.

Booming into resonant, deafening echoes, the liner's whistle blared with titanic uproar; it blurred the doctor's spent and shaken senses as he crawled, trembling violently, between packing-cases in the gloom of the great vessel's hold.

Down on his knees he dropped. Feeling here, there, he sought the little valise. He found it.

"Safe, *now, anyhow!*" he panted.

Bells trilled and jangled. A more powerful shuddering gripped the hull as the engines quickened their pace. The doctor heard footsteps questing along the iron floor-plates of the hold.

"Hey, you!" hailed a voice. "Come out o' there!"

But he answered nothing. Clasping the hand-bag to his breast, he smiled.

"In a fortnight, Marseilles!" he thought. "And then—"

CHAPTER II

THE LITTLE GATE

ON December 2, just ten days later, Dr. Dennison climbed down from the Bordeaux express at the little white-stone station of Cette, on the Mediterranean, some hundred miles west of Marseilles.

Despite a rather better color than he had shown in New York—due to the long sea-trip—the doctor seemed to have lost strength. New lines had graven themselves in his face; the former ones had grown deeper; he looked old and tired, seemingly consumed by the fevers of impatience or strong mental stress as he stood there blinking on the crowded platform, his eyes watering in the strong glare of southern sun-light on the chalky buildings and white roads. He still gripped the little medical satchel.

For a moment he peered around him, as though to make sure his presence was attracting no undue attention. Then, finding to all appearances he passed as an ordinary tourist, he hailed a cab, climbed in, ordered, "To the Château d'Eau."

When the cab had reached the little park stretching up the first steep slopes of Mount St. Clair, he ordered the coachman to stop. He got out, paid liberally, and without a single word, set off up the mountain.

Though it was winter, yet here on the Riviera the temperature was that of an American June. Presently, the doctor, swabbing his heated forehead, stopped, exhausted, and gazed back at the wide panorama already beginning to spread

out in all its splendor beneath him.

The vast azure sheet of the sea stretched away to its horizon of hazy gold. Nearer, the town lay maplike in the sheltering arms of the breakwaters. Ordinarily Dennison might have seen and pondered on the beauty of this southern landscape; but now he turned away to scan the heights above.

"How much farther?" he demanded petulantly, with overwrought nerves. "Great heavens, what a climb! I ought to have known about this, and started six months ago. What if anything should have happened to him? And me with sclerosis and—but there's no use thinking about *that*. Up, and at it!" And once more he began the long, steep, weary ascent. To his tired, weak eyes the bright glory of the scene brought no relief. "If I'm only not too late!" he panted as he labored upward.

Narrower now and steeper grew the way, with terraced steps and high boundary walls topped with broken glass set in cement. These walls were pierced only by an occasional gateway, inscribed with some fanciful name or other to denote the villa hidden far inside among the groves of cedar, olive, and dark-foliaged orange. The doctor gave them no more than a passing glance. For now the brow of the mountain lay not far above him.

"Just a few minutes more!" judged he, as he topped the crest of the height and came out upon a sort of plateau which slanted downward to the south till cut off by a sheer thousand-foot drop of the cliffs abutting the sea.

This plateau, he found, was—like the mountainside itself—covered with villas and cottages safe-hidden beyond winding walls. An occasional tiled roof or chimney-pot showed through the groves. Here and there, on either hand, other winding alleys opened from the one wherein Dr. Dennison walked forward. A regular labyrinth of runways developed.

"Which way?" queried the doctor in perplexity, mopping his bald head. "Ah! Now I see!" Again he hastened forward. Forgotten were heat, fatigue, and the weakness of advanced years. "Almost there!" he exclaimed, with exultation.

A FEW hundred feet farther along the walled road he came to a still narrower, curving alley. This he followed. Before long he found himself cut off from even sight of the way he had come.

An ominous stillness brooded on the mountain-top. Nothing could he see but the walls on either side, and the slow-drifting clouds that now and then dimmed the blue above him. The doctor, his fists clenched with intense excitement, strode forward.

All at once he came to a low, heavily hinged gate in the wall which terminated the alleyway. Set into the solid masonry, the gate of oaken beams showed row on row of hand-hammered copper rivets. A tiny peep-hole permitted any one inside to observe whomsoever might demand admittance. The single word "Science" was painted in dull white on the weathered planks.

"Here! Here it is, as I live!" exclaimed the doctor in a hushed voice.

For a brief moment he pressed his hand—wasted and big-knuckled, with the swollen and distorted veins of age already prominent—over his eyes. Then with a singularly harsh laugh, which echoed eerily in that narrow-walled space, he seized the old bronze bell-handle at the right of the gate. Eager, yet as though half reluctant, too, he gave it a vigorous pull.

Sharply he stepped back. He waited. No result. Approaching the gate, he tried to peer in through the little hole; but the aperture was stopped by a slide within. In feverish expectation he waited.

Once more he was about to ring, when somewhere inside the wall he heard a crunching of gravel, some one was drawing near.

Dennison stepped up to the gate again, and knocked hard with his bony knuckles.

"Patience! Patience! I come!" adjured a voice within. Though the words were spoken in French, the accent was strongly Italian.

All at once the doctor saw an eye peering at him through the little hole.

"Is—is this the—villa of Dr. Alessandro Pagani?" faltered Dennison. Now that he had need of most assurance, his lips trembled and his throat would hardly serve him.

"Oui, m'sieur," answered the owner of the eye.

"I—this—is he at home?"

"He is. And then?" He added quickly: "He sees very few visitors, *m'sieur*, and no strangers at all."

"I must see him to-day, at once. *Must*, you understand? I have wired him that I was coming."

"Ah! So *monsieur* sent that?"

A lock turned, and bolts slid back. Dennison, trembling with strong emotion, stepped inside the enclosure. Then the gate closed again.

The doctor found himself confronted by a singular Janus—a short, fat little fellow with bristling mustache, wattled cheeks, and a reddish cast of hair which clearly showed his Lombard strain.

Snapping both heels together like a soldier, this odd individual saluted stiffly in military fashion. Dennison judged him correctly as being an old ex-conscript.

"Well?" demanded the American.

"Follow me, *m'sieur*."

He turned, and with no further speech, set out. Dennison, glancing nervously round, his fatigue now all forgotten, walked close behind him toward the object of this long, exhausting pilgrimage.

CHAPTER III

IL VECCHIO AND STASIA

THE path, neatly sanded, led, with many a turn and twist, in the general direction of the sea. Excited as the doctor was, he nevertheless perceived the unusual beauty of the estate. Cypresses, palms, fruit-trees, and strange exotics grew in profusion—some with flame-hued blossoms, others crowned with yellow or with purple splendor. On either hand well-kept lawns extended.

Through the greenery sparkled a fountain, and far beyond, blue as turquoise, glinted a stretch of the wondrous inland sea.

Without a word of comment or information, the Lombard guided Dennison toward a long, low, red-tiled dwelling which now became visible through the clumps of cedar and old olive. Presently he stopped to speak to an aged man whom the American took to be a gardener. Casually observing, in his keen impatience to stand at once before Pagani, Dr. Dennison beheld a tall, somewhat stooping figure clad in the long, blue smock used commonly by French peasants.

This old man wore on his hoary head a béret, or working man's cap, of white felt, very large and full, with a little tassel at the crown. His gray-stockinged feet were thrust into sabots. From under the smock projected loose corduroy trousers. A red sash completed the costume.

Even as the Lombard spoke to him he continued industriously digging round a rose-bush with a clumsy, old-fashioned spade. Dennison saw him nod, observed the long, white beard move in speech a moment, then beheld him turn and gaze as though in careful contemplation of the newcomer.

Flushing with sudden anger, now accentuated by long fatigue and gnawing fears, the American stepped forward.

"Come, come!" he exclaimed, "I've got no time to waste like this. Where's your master? Take me to him."

The Lombard stared in sudden astonishment. He made as though to speak. But the gardener, raising a hand, mildly inquired in almost faultless English:

"Master? What word is that, sir? We do not understand it here. Inside our gates, so long as we all keep good faith, there is no servant and no master. We live, here, that we may serve."

Dennison stared with growing irritation.

"Here is the doctor!" the patriarch announced.

Dennison turned and peered all about him, squinting in the hot sunlight. His trembling fingers gripped the handle of the bag. Burning with rage, he faced back again. Were these yokels mocking him?

"Come, now, do you really want to see him?" smiled the aged man.

With a sniff, the American glared at him.

"If you should come face to face with him, would you deign to grasp his hand?" ventured the gardener in a sort of amused tolerance.

Dennison tried to bring words to utterance, but failed.

"Well, give me your hand, my son, friend of my friend!" exclaimed the patriarch. He straightened up to his full height—a tall, broad-shouldered, and imposing figure of a man, noble of chest and loins, with a strong-corded throat visible through the open folds of the smock. And, standing thus, he stretched out a large, strong palm by no means guiltless of contact with the soil.

FOR a moment Dennison stood amazed and speechless, all sorts of conflict-

ing thoughts assailing him. Then he cried: "You—you mean—"

The old man bowed his head in affirmation.

"Yes," he replied, smiling, "I am Pagani. My few friends and the people here, inside my gates, hardly think of me as a doctor at all. I am merely one among them; I am only Il Vecchio—the ancient one."

"But," stammered Dennison, "but—I expected—"

"Of course!" assented Pagani. He seized the American's hand in a warm, hearty grasp. "I understand. You probably expected to find some formidable savant immured in a den with dried bodies, skulls, bats, and all the rest of the regulation alchemistic mummery? Well," and he shrugged his powerful shoulders, "if so, I must disappoint you.

"I am only a common, ordinary man among men, the least of any, albeit of great age. I, too, serve. Even among the rose-trees, which I love to favor with a little more sunlight and warmth and life, I find simple, quiet satisfaction. But of these things we can speak later. You are weary now. Come in the house and rest a while. Then we can talk. Not now.

"Even though you come from Witham, to whom I owe my life—even though all I have is yours, to my last bit of bread and wine—I must bid you rest before you state your errand."

Releasing Dennison's hand, he dismissed the Lombard with a gesture of finality.

"Come, now," he queried of Dennison, "will you honor me by entering my door?"

He took the satchel from his guest, and led the way toward the house. With a smile, he stood aside for Dennison to enter first. Quiet and a trifle slow, his every gesture was courtesy embodied—the perfect, poised courtesy of the cultured European.

In the hallway Dennison faced him with growing excitement. Now that the first surprise of this meeting had a trifle worn away, the object of his mission, ever-urgent, incessantly burning in his mind, forced the American to speak.

"I—I'm not tired!" he exclaimed in a hoarse, quivering voice that utterly belied his words. "Never felt better in my life. Let me have just a few minutes' talk with you *now*. I've come all the way from New York to ask you a question. I can't wait much longer. Won't you—"

"My friend," interrupted Il Vecchio, raising a hand for silence, "no, no, I must refuse. Out of regard for you, and for the man in whose name you come to me. I must decline. Rest—you need rest. After that as many questions as you please. But for the present, even were you Witham himself, I could not talk with you. Come!"

And now he led the way up a broad stone flight of steps, which, turning at the half-way landing, led to the second story. Here he showed Dennison to a large sunny room, furnished in the manner of a hundred years ago, and with a curtained bed set in an alcove. The windows gave a magnificent view of the grounds, with a wide stretch of seascape beyond. But even this peaceful chamber could not calm the American's overwrought nerves. Impatiently he turned to the old man, who, smiling, said:

"In an hour from this time you can find me in my study. But would it not be wiser to wait until to-morrow for whatever business you may have with me? We have much time. Nothing presses. To-morrow, then?"

"No, no!" Dennison objected hastily. "I'm all right *now!* Can't you give me just a few minutes' time immediately? If—"

Il Vecchio shook his head.

"*Au revoir,*" he murmured, bowing himself out.

Dennison, astonished, watched the singular figure in peasant garb retreating down the hall. The sabots clinked on the tiled floor. With a grimace of vexation the American turned back into the room, closed the door, and, planting both hands on his lank hips, stood there in deep thought.

By the way his lower lip projected, and by the scowl on his tired, travel-worn face, his vexation was apparent.

At length, with an exclamation of: "Well, he holds all the cards!" Dennison began taking off his coat and collar, and started to remove the stains of travel.

"Am I crazy—or is he?" wondered the American.

HALF an hour later, somewhat restored by cool water and by some fruit and wine which the Lombard had brought him, the doctor wandered downstairs again. He felt the need of constant activity. Fevered mind and body alike

demanded it. Though he himself hardly realized the fact, the last fortnight had burned up energies in him which might have sufficed for five years of ordinary, tranquil life.

Knowing not which way to go, in the wide-reaching grounds, and caring less, he idled down a broad path which led through aloes, palms, and mulberry-trees to a vine-covered belvedere, perched on a jutting out-crop of yellow-white volcanic stone a full fifth of a mile above the sea. He viewed the wide and splendid prospect with no more than languid interest. His every thought was centered on Il Vecchio, and on the question that he hoped would soon be answered.

So, there he stood on the steps of the summer-house, a lean, bent, eagerly introspective figure, with coming senility apparent in every feature, every line, and look.

"Half an hour yet to wait!" he growled in petulant impatience. "Half an hour, when every minute's a month to me!" And with hot anger in his eyes, he went on up into the summer-house.

Suddenly he stopped, peering in the strong sunlight. For, at the far end of the pergola, half-hidden in the mottled shadow, he all at once perceived somebody sitting—a girl clad all in white, with a crimson scarf thrown loosely over her hair.

"I—I beg pardon!" stammered the doctor, raising his hat. "Didn't know there was anybody here. Not intruding, I hope?"

"Oh, not in the least," replied the girl, smiling at him with friendly interest. She spoke in French, which Dennison knew thoroughly. "No friend of my uncle's could possibly intrude. Will you come up and rest?"

She laid aside the embroidery-hoop which she had been busy with, and, rising, graciously indicated a seat on the vine-shaded bench that circled the end of the pergola.

"Don't let me disturb you!" exclaimed the doctor, momentarily forgetting even his keen impatience and annoyance, in presence of this unexpected beauty. And, still hat in hand, he stood a moment undecided whether to retreat or to accept the invitation and remain a while. Half-consciously he seemed to realize the glaring discrepancy between the youth and charm of this French girl, embowered in blossoms and with the eternal splendor of the Riviera for background, and his own anemic, withered ugliness. Yet for all that he sat down heavily upon the bench.

"The—the warmth here—" he began. "We Americans, you know, are used to a more rigorous climate—more bracing, you understand."

She answered nothing for a moment, but merely regarded him with a half-puzzled smile. Then she sat down, too, and once more began busying herself with her embroidery.

"So you are an American?" she asked. "Like Dr. Witham, of whom my uncle so often speaks. We see very few Americans here. Sometimes a German doctor comes, or an Italian. Once we had a Swedish surgeon. Uncle—and I—we always welcome everybody who comes in good faith and in the name of science." Thus, in the sweetest conceivable accent, she concluded.

And, with a serious expression quite surprising to the doctor, she gazed at him with level eyes. No child, she, though he judged her at no more than one or two-and twenty, yet (as is common with women of warm climates) she seemed to have developed far beyond the expectation of her years. As Dennison, still a trifle confused, returned her look, he could not help noting the perfect oval of her face, her piquant chin and finely modeled throat, clearly revealed by the soft folds of the organdy.

HER frank inspection of him completed, she once more resumed her task. In spite of the doctor's intense perturbation of mind and the burning impatience which possessed him, he could not suppress feelings of admiration in watching her deft fingers ply the needle. Thoughtfully he observed her as she turned the tight-stretched linen, or held it out for inspection.

"Oh, were I only thirty!" the thought flashed to him, and his heart leaped. A momentary giddiness possessed him. He pressed his hand over his eyes, and for a moment sat thus, with the warm breeze on his cheek, the sound of the breakers, far below, making dull undertones to the little air the girl was humming.

Presently he calmed himself again. Nothing could be gained, he knew, by permitting the fire of impatience to burn away his energies even before his strange quest was begun. And so, striving to

steady his voice, he spoke to her of Witham, of her uncle, and of the privilege he, the newcomer, esteemed it that he was now enabled to enjoy acquaintance with a man of world-reputation like Dr. Alessandro Pagani.

By seemingly careless, yet deeply thought questions, he strove to gain from the girl some knowledge of the Italian's latest discoveries and of their results. But she quite evidently knew little or nothing of all this.

"Why should he tell *me?*" she said, smiling. "I live here, simply, quietly, and ask few questions of that sort. What? Is it different in America?"

And so they came to speak of contrasts, of Cette, and of the life which to hers seemed so commonplace, so matter-of-fact, then of the States—that land to her unknown, mysterious and romantic.

At last, glancing at his watch, he arose.

"Pardon me," he said, his voice betraying emotion so strong that the girl glanced up in wonderment. "I—I must go. To-morrow—"

"You will tell me more about the new world?" she asked, smiling a whole-souled smile which showed her flawless teeth. "How kind you are! It is for you to pardon me, if I have kept you from an appointment with my uncle. *Au revoir!*"

He bowed again, and returned to the house. The girl, parting the vines that shielded the pergola, watched him with an expression of keen interest.

A slight tinge of emotion seemed to thrill through Stasia's sylphish form. She was impressed with Dr. Dennison, yet she could not comprehend the curious feeling that had come over her during their conversation.

"His eyes, how eager!" she thought. "They burn as with a fever. His hands clasp and unclasp. He bites his lip, and the lines of his face have not all been engraved by time. What can it mean? Why does he seek my uncle?"

For a few minutes she sat pondering, while the sea boomed in the clefts and caverns far below. Then, with an unsatisfied shake of the head, she took up her embroidery-hoop again.

But even that could not restore her calm. A new expression had possessed her features. In her eyes lay shadows as of uneasiness, of vague and prescient fear, as though her soul unconsciously could read the writing in the book of fate.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUESTION

THE Lombard directed Dr. Dennison to Il Vecchio's study. With the usual military salute he pointed the way toward the room, which was reached by a flight of stone steps leading down from the main hallway of the house. It seemed to occupy a sort of basement, for on three sides were no windows; but on the fourth, which looked out over the olive-grove, both light and air came freely in. For not only did all four windows stand open there, but also a large glazed door admitted the freshness, and in among the twining rose-trees and the wisterias idled the thyme-scented breeze of the French Riviera.

The savant rose to meet his visitor, who saw that the smock and sabots had been laid aside. Il Vecchio now wore a loose, comfortable velvet jacket of old-fashioned cut, and a pair of well-trodden morocco slippers. The white béret had been exchanged for a round skull-cap, which covered the old man's baldness.

Dennison noted at a glance the half-smoked cigar which lay upon a copper tray and whence blue perfumes wafted upward. He observed the plain comfort of the room; the tiled floor, covered with rugs, the strong, serviceable furniture, which showed the good taste of the master. A broad leather couch, disorderly crowded book-shelves, and—in one corner—a by no means depleted wine-closet proclaimed that Il Vecchio, despite all his erudition, knew and appreciated the good things of life.

"This is favorable," thought the American, as his host shook hands with him. "He's no narrow, crabbed misanthrope, that's plainly to be seen. Just a humane, simple, kindly old man. Couldn't be better!" Thus did he analyze the physicist; and behind his glasses his eyes grew hard, cold, and calculating.

But Il Vecchio left him little time for consideration.

"Will you smoke, my friend?" he asked, hospitably extending his cigar-case. "It's a bad habit I have—one of many. Without our human frailties, our weaknesses, and our habits, what would life be worth?" And he smiled, as if a man who, understanding all things, was tolerant of all.

Dennison refused with a shake of the

head. Cigars were on his "don't" list.

"No," he replied, "I'm sorry, but I mustn't. Haven't touched tobacco for two years. Wine has been denied me for the past five. One by one all the pleasures of life have been taken away. One by one my senses have betrayed me." His tone grew bitter. "First, sight began to fail, about ten years ago. A gradual dimness, you understand. Then hearing became impaired. And I a physician, too! Then—"

Il Vecchio interrupted with a raised hand.

"Come, come, my friend!" he exclaimed. What words are these? You are over-tired even yet. Unnerved, perhaps, by the long journey and the heat and all the unaccustomed conditions of life here in the south. Put aside these thoughts! Let us speak of pleasanter things. If you have come to consult me, as from your telegram I infer you have, there will be time enough for that in a day or two, when you are rested and quite yourself again."

"But, doctor, I cannot wait! The question I have come four thousand miles to ask you—"

"No, no; if I am to be your advisor, I must dictate the terms! Come, sir, be seated. Calm yourself." With a single turn of his muscular wrist he wheeled an easy chair round for his visitor. "Try this," he commanded. "It cannot fail to rest you." He laid his hand on Dennison's breast, and gently yet irresistibly forced him to sit down.

"Ah, you Americans!" he exclaimed, bringing up another chair and choosing a fresh cigar from the box. "So impetuous, so full of business, so hurried! With you, the first thing is always business! Not so with us, *monsieur*. My niece Stasia and I, together with Bartolommeo and the good old peasant woman who cooks for us all—we have a different regime, restful, quiet, rational, as you shall see. But, come, come," he added more quickly; "tell me, first of all, how is Witham? When did you see him last? What is he doing now? Always that splendid research-work of his, I take it? His welfare lies very close to my heart. You come to me from him. I welcome you again because of that! Tell me about him. Tell me all, everything—forget no detail!"

Dennison, thus constrained, yielded as gracefully as his shaken nerves and his infirmity would permit. With a strong effort he forced himself into some semblance of composure. And while the old man gravely listened, smoking the while, he told all he knew of the great American surgeon through whose kindness he had now gained such instant and unusual favor from Pagani.

The Italian, listening, keenly observed his guest. He noted how Dennison fidgeted in his chair, how the man's fingers twisted, and how, from time to time, the facial muscles involuntarily contracted.

"Neurasthenia, complicated by general physical breakdown, and premature senility due to overwork and strain," he diagnosed the case in his own mind. "Only too common among Americans. Ah, well, a few weeks here will very largely remedy all that." And with a word here or there, he continued to draw out Dennison regarding Witham, who had been his university mate at Budapest many years before.

AT LENGTH, fully satisfied, Il Vecchio tossed his smoked-out cigar in the fireplace.

"I thank you," he remarked. "This news has been of vital interest to me. Now, how can I serve *you*? Why have you come so far to seek me, an obscure experimenter? Command me. You have but to speak!"

Dennison, abruptly confronted with his opportunity, went pale. He blinked nervously, then fell to fingering his close-cropped, bristly white mustache.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"What is it you wish? Treatment at my hands? Rest? Retirement for a time from the world? Speak freely. All I have is yours!"

For a moment the American, overwhelmed with emotion, found no words. Then he leaned forward in his chair. He peered straight at Il Vecchio, his eyes burning with new fire.

"Is—is it true," he queried in an almost inaudible voice—"is it indeed true, as I have heard from Witham in a letter, that your—your experiment has at last succeeded?"

"My experiment? Why, which experiment? I always have a dozen or two under way in my laboratory." With a wave of the hand he indicated a door at the rear of the study. "Which particular one do you mean?"

"The one dealing with—with life and its essence! The immortality of the body! The renewal of youth! Have you found—the secret?"

Il Vecchio frowned. Two deep lines formed between his brows. For a moment he regarded Dennison, who, in his intense agitation, had gripped the arms of the chair and now sat there panting with uncontrollable excitement.

"Well, what if I have?" suddenly asked the patriarch. "What, then?"

"*Have* you found it? Tell me!"

"Tell you? What are you asking? Suppose I *have* discovered the vital principle—"

"You admit it?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" cried the old man, for the first time stung into visible irritation. "Why?"

"*Why?*" shouted the American, his self-control fast dying. He sprang up. "You have this secret, and you—you ask me why I want to know? Here!" He flung his trembling hands outward. "I am dying! *Give me life!*"

Il Vecchio, a slow fire beginning to smolder in his deep-set eyes, still sat motionless in the easy chair beside the table.

"*Life!*" choked the American.

The old man raised a warning, an imploring hand.

"Not so loud," he commanded. "You forget yourself, good friend. Some one may overhear you. Be calm!"

"But—"

"No, no; you can gain nothing by undue haste or importunate demands." And Il Vecchio smiled again, that wise, shrewd, tolerant smile of his. "Here," he added, rising, "let me pour you a soothing drink." He took down from the wine-closet a flask of crimson liqueur. Filling a glass, he held it out. But Dennison refused.

"No, no!" he cried. "It isn't *that* I want! It's—"

"Very well, then," the savant interrupted sternly. "Let the conversation cease. You are overwrought and weary. Let us take a little walk through the grounds. My roses and—"

"I implore you, doctor, hear me! My time is very short, much shorter, perhaps, than you suspect. I, too, am a physician; I understand. Why weary you with symptoms? Look at me, as I am, and judge! Only by straining my last fag-ends of strength to the very breaking-point have I been able even to reach you at all. Now, every hour is precious. Every minute! Let us talk!"

Il Vecchio peered sharply at him from under those pent-house brows of his. He set down the wine-glass.

"Very well," he conceded, with a curious look. "What then?"

For a moment the American bent his head, as though ashamed of his outburst. Then he glanced up.

"On what terms," he asked in an even, toneless voice, "will you permit me to be the subject of your experiments along this line? The risks are all my own. Gladly will I assume them. You will accept me on what terms?"

"Terms?" cried Il Vecchio in surprise.

"Yes. That's the plainest and most honest way to put it. All that I possess—"

"Stop! Do not speak to me of money!" interrupted Il Vecchio deprecatingly.

"But I—"

"No, no! What should I do with wealth? I have here everything I need. Money would but prove a dross and burden. As I am, behold me, content. Science takes no thought for wealth. Do not speak of money!"

Dennison remained a moment in thought. Then he said:

"Well, in the name of humanity, I make my appeal. And for the love you bear the friend who is mine, too, as well as yours."

"Ah, now you speak a better language," answered the philosopher. "Viewed thus, the question is less sordid. Yet it is formidable. You ask me to divulge to you, in a moment, the crowning secret of my whole life-work. No, more than that—the climax of three thousand years' unending search and travail. You ask that I should give it all to you. Why? By what title?"

Dennison, abashed, could not meet the piercing eyes of the old man. He pressed both hands over his face and for a moment stood there, shaken and unnerved.

"THREE thousand years," repeated the scientist as if in a sort of retrospective reverie. "Think of what you are asking! At one blow you are seeking to cut through the whole fabric that began with the black arts of Khmi, in Egypt, and that only now seems ended here on the summit of this mountain by the sea. In one moment you would con-

sume the results of centuries of toil! Toil begun far back in the twilight of civilization, carried on by Aristotle and the Greeks, nurtured by Albertus Magnus, Bacon, and Aquinas, developed by Paracelsus and Basil Valentine, by Lully and Spinoza, by Newton and an unnumerable host of others. Come, come, my impetuous friend, by the shades of Hermes Trismegistus, you know not what you ask!"

"I know only that I am dying—dying before my time! Save me!"

"Save you? You, an individual, by sacrificing what should eventually belong to all mankind? This is no secret, I tell you, with its toil-worn pedigree, its record of human agony and heart-break, of suffering, madness, and death, to be divulged in a five-minute chat, or to be administered after meals in a tablespoon, like any patent nostrum! First ask yourself whether you have the knowledge, the faith, the understanding, and the fortitude, the purity of heart to risk—"

"Why, what have all those got to do with my merely taking your drug?" Dennison cried, anger suddenly overcoming discretion. "If you accept me as a patient, agree in my diagnosis, and—"

"Ah, my friend," the patriarch interrupted, sadly shaking his head, "I see you understand very little of the nature of this thing. How should you? Without a long novitiate—"

"*What?* When, at this rate, I have at most only a month or two of life?"

Il Vecchio gazed thoughtfully for a moment at his guest. Then he said, with sudden determination:

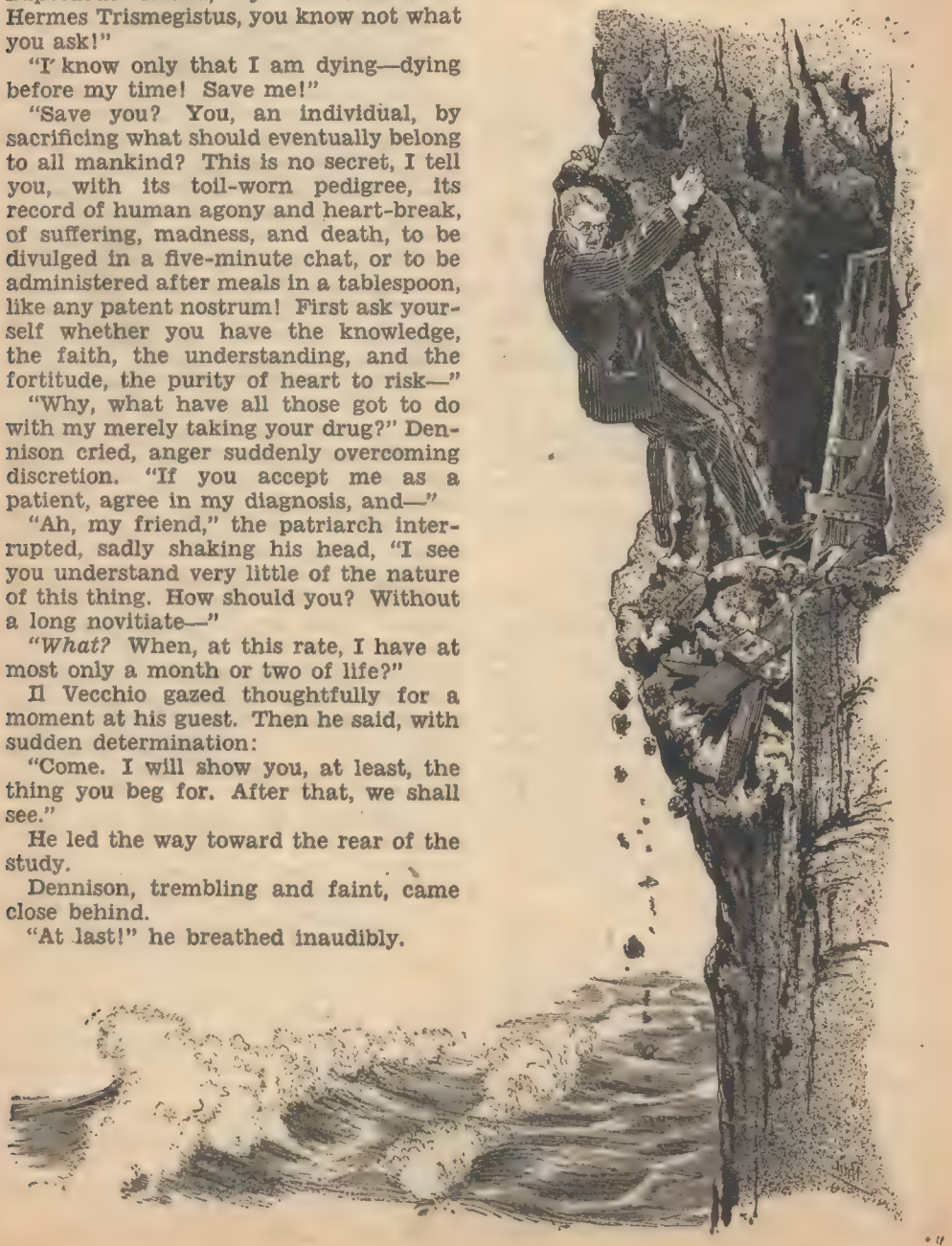
"Come. I will show you, at least, the thing you beg for. After that, we shall see."

He led the way toward the rear of the study.

Dennison, trembling and faint, came close behind.

"At last!" he breathed inaudibly.

What . . . ? he wondered. There in the face of the cliff he saw a narrow opening, and the remains of a stout door



CHAPTER V

ARCH-TREASON

IN THE wall, Dennison saw a solidly built door, provided with what seemed strikingly out of place in the environment—a combination lock.

At the American's startled glance, Il Vecchio smiled.

"One does not leave one's life-work exposed even to a well-meaning niece and man-servant," he explained. "A little dusting or cleaning or setting things in order might wreck years of toil. Hence the precautions."

Speaking, he stooped, and fell to working over the dial. Dennison's breath choked him. His head swam. He had to set a hand against the wall for support. The time seemed endless; yet in reality it was but a minute till the door swung open.

Then, as the old man snapped a switch, the room within became bathed in a soft, purple light. Dennison had never seen its equal for calm radiance. He stared, astonished, even in his burning eagerness, at the ceiling, which glowed like a huge firefly. Lamps there were none; but from above the illumination flooded down in wondrous beauty.

Il Vecchio noted his astonishment.

"You do not understand even that?" he asked, with good-humored patronage. "Yet after all it is a mere trifle compared with the mystery which but a minute ago you were asking me to plunge you into, all unprepared! My light is nothing but a perfect vacuum in flat glass accumulators masked in the ceiling. A little mechanical agitator raps the central accumulator and sets up ether-waves. By varying the rhythm of the agitator, I easily change the ether wave-lengths and the color of the light—you see?"

He moved a pointer on a dial under the switch, swiftly running the gamut of the spectrum from the most unearthly brilliant violet to dazzling green and deep red. Then, bringing it immediately back to purple, he laughed with a touch of malice.

"Suppose I really wanted money," he queried, "and made this invention public? Can you conceive the millions that would be mine? Save for the creation of the initial vacuum—which is my secret, shared only by the humble glowworm—and for the negligible expense of the agitator, this light costs nothing. One franc a year will illuminate all Paris. And I alone understand the method. Yet you offer to bribe *me?*"

"But," stammered the American, burning with shame, "is it ethical to withhold such powers from the world?"

Il Vecchio only laughed, and motioned Dennison to follow. The door closed behind them. Together they advanced into a spacious and underground room.

Confused and shaken, the visitor glanced round. He got an impression of a well-equipped and busy laboratory. He saw long tables, shelves, and stands covered with a profusion of bottles, flasks, and retorts, and test-tubes. At one side was a marble sink with running water. Some process was in operation there, for a trickling stream fell from a spigot into a funnel lined with filter-paper. White and clear it entered the funnel, to emerge blood-red and collect in a huge carboy.

Here, an acetylene-flame burned under a graphite crucible. Strange fumes rose. There, an intensely brilliant little point of light, clear blue, sparkled inside a twisted apparatus of flint glass. Other activities were also going forward. Il Vecchio assured himself that all was well. Then with a searching look he turned to Dennison.

"Think," he said, twisting a strand of his white beard between thumb and finger, "think what Empedocles would have given to have been able to spend an hour, even ten minutes, in this place! Think what the Alexandrine monks, the Arabs under the Abbassids, even Geber himself would have suffered, to see the fruition of their labors here at last an actuality!"

"Where *is* it, this fruition?" the American exclaimed eagerly. "The Elixir! Is it here?" Weak with excitement and wild hope, he leaned for support against a table upon which an alembic was boiling. Swift little phosphorescences played over the surface of the liquid. Dennison felt a strange, shuddering uneasiness. For a moment he seemed strangling, there in that windowless, pungent-aired, glowing chamber. Unsteadliy he stretched out his hand.

"Where is it?" he cried again. "Let me look upon it! Let me see it—only see it! Life!"

With an odd, wondering critical expression, the savant observed him.

"So, my friend," he queried, with a

ghost of a smile—"so you become agitated here, even in the vicinity of the secret? Yet only a minute ago you wanted to know all at once! Ah, you Americans are hard to understand!"

He turned away. Dennison, shaking all over, trying in vain to moisten his lips with his dry tongue, watched him as in a dream.

THE old man made his way slowly to a steel door about eighteen inches wide by two feet high. This door, set into the solid masonry in the left wall of the chamber, was some three and a half feet above the cement floor. Like the outer door, this also was secured by a combination.

Saying not a word, Il Vecchio spun the knob. Dennison, breathing heavily, remained beside the table, staring through his glasses. The strong purple light that gushed from the vacuum-ceiling, suppressed all shadows. It cast an eery, unnatural radiance over everything. Save for the bubbling of the reactions and the click-click-click of the wards as Il Vecchio labored over the combination, an unnatural silence drew tense between the men.

Dennison's heart was beating with dull haste. He felt the blood hammering painfully in his temples. He tried to clear his throat, in a vain attempt to speak, but made only a hoarse, unintelligible sound.

Now Il Vecchio had got the door open—at last! Now he was reaching inside the small, thickly padded aperture which lay within the frame of steel. Now he was taking out a strong little box of cedar-wood, with brass hinges and a padlocked hasp.

With this he turned to the American.

"Come!" he commanded, in a deep voice.

Dennison faltered nearer.

"Is it—in that box?" he gasped, his voice all but inaudible.

"Impatient, still?" the old man chided. "Yes, here it is. In a minute, now, you shall see it. Presently, presently."

He extracted from his pocket a silver ring, with many keys.

"Yes, I will show you the crowning essence of my years of toil," he continued, choosing the proper key and inserting it in the padlock. "The supreme result of all my study, care, and long research. Even though you may not taste, yet you may look upon it. Wait only one minute now; then you shall see!"

Speaking, he unlocked the little chest and threw back the lid.

"Behold the miracle of miracles!" he cried. "The solvent of death, sought by sages and scholars since the dim, nebulous beginning of things!

"For this, their crucibles and furnaces burned through all the long dim ages of antiquity. For this they labored with their aludels, their fixations, lixiviations, transmutations! For this they suffered, some starvation, others death by the stake, the rack, the noose. For this, for this!"

Forgetting even to breathe, Dennison half-crouched there at his side, staring with wide eyes and fevered passion of eagerness at the thing that lay within.

On a bed of softest white cotton-down reposed a metal flask about four and a half or five inches long. Curiously wrought and chased in arabesques it was; and where the graver's tool had bitten deep, the unmistakable luster of pure gold shone forth.

Caressingly Il Vecchio took up the flask from its bed. He held it in his aged fingers, turned it this way and that; then, extending it toward Dennison, said more quietly:

"Within this vial rests the secret of all the ages. Can you believe it? Does it not seem manifestly impossible? Do you not think me vainly boastful in making the assertion? Yet it is true, and I have proved it!"

The American made no answer. Il Vecchio continued:

"Where Roger Bacon and Geber failed with their gold dissolved in hydrochloric acid, I have succeeded. Where Aquinas and Lully got only disappointment with their *aqua vitae ardens*, I have achieved success. They were all working on mistaken lines, yet in them, too, inhered a grain of truth. Crookes, Lodge and Becquerel, and all that school, with their surmises as to radio-activities and the transmutation of elements, have come near the facts. I give them credit. Yet even so, I, combining all, have won the prize. And here it is at last—the true and only *Aqua Regia*, the Alkahest!"

"You—you mean," stammered Dennison, "that you've really got the—Elixir of Life in—in that flask?"

"Nothing else!" replied the aged doctor. "Here I have it, fast prisoned. There is

but an ounce and a half, true; and so far I have been unable to create any more of the base on which this solution is formed. To be frank with you, a little luck entered into my final result, a still elusive reaction. Were this destroyed I am not positive that I could ever manufacture any more. But so long as I still keep this I can increase the quantity by slow, elaborate distillations. So you perceive its value, this thing which you are rashly begging for?"

Dennison nodded.

"Yes," he answered hoarsely. "It is life!"

"LIFE itself," assented Il Vecchio, holding up the vial. "Life, in a few scant drops. And it is mine! Like Faustus, I know the mystery. But unlike him, I have not been obliged to barter my soul away for it. At least, not yet! No, I have only had to follow some twelve thousand experiments to an arduous conclusion, by strict scientific methods. The result has justified the inhuman labor. See, now, I will show you a little of the thing itself!"

Smiling, he took up a graduated glass from the bench. Carefully he inspected it. He rinsed it in a sterilizing solution, which he washed away with distilled water. Then, setting it close at hand, he began unscrewing the gold top of the vial.

"The Alkahest!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I have christened it with the name that Paracelsus gave to his imaginary universal element. Not that his idea was right, for there is not, nor can there ever be, any one substance which will both transmute the baser metals into gold and also renew the protoplasmic *Urschleim* which lies at the base of all life. Paracelsus' theory that life is a fire and the body a kind of fuel is utterly untenable. I have proved that life itself is the material thing. And *this* is the fuel—the fire which burns out the dross and frees the body forever from all pain, decay, and death."

Even as he spoke he had finished removing the flask-top. Then with a steady hand he poured out, into the graduate, seven drops of a most brilliant, scintillating liquid.

Golden as the vial itself, with iridescent blends of color, it lay lustrous and beautiful at the bottom of the flint glass.

"You see?" Il Vecchio asked. "Can you compute the value of this thing? Can you conceive the treasures that would deluge me if I but made it known and were willing to sell it?" He held the graduate up to the light, and turned it this way, then that. "Millionaires, kings, emperors—can you not behold them undertaking pilgrimages to me, and doing homage, and making my life intolerable? Do you wonder that, except to Witham and to you, who come from him, I have divulged this to no living soul?"

The American, sick with emotion, leaned heavily against the edge of the long table. Instinctively he stretched out his hand as though to clutch the glass; but Il Vecchio shook a forbidding head.

"No, no!" he cried. "You do not understand! You fail to realize the dangers that lie in this essence. Even I do not know as yet just how little or how much is needed to render the life-process static or reverse decline. I must yet immolate hosts of guinea-pigs with my solution and hypodermic needles before I shall be fully informed. Be patient!"

And already he began pouring the liquor back into its receptacle.

"You see," he added, "I cannot leave it long exposed to the air, for it is highly volatile."

"You—you—cannot—give—" stammered Dennison.

"How can I?" answered Il Vecchio, once more screwing on the cover. "Be reasonable, my friend; be satisfied. You have seen what no other human eyes than mine have yet beheld. Let this suffice!"

"But, listen!"

"No, no, anything but this. Science forbids. It is impossible!"

"That's your last word?"

"Come, come, where is your sense of professional ethics? You cannot really mean to ask for the Alkahest! My house is yours, my garden, my table, my library and all I have; but—not even I myself would buy back youth at the price of drinking this!"

"So, then, you putter with guinea-pigs and rabbits, and decline to accept me as a subject for experimentation? You refuse to save my life?"

"No, not that," replied the old man, showing now a trifle of vexation. "How can a man of your intelligence misunderstand me so egregiously? Kock or Pasteur with a new serum, Ehrich with his '606'—would they have been justified in using all their new-found power, undeveloped

as yet, for one man's benefit? Would not the whole world condemn and execrate such an action? Wait! Be patient, I say. We shall see. If, as I hope, you are mistaken about your own condition, and you stay with me a few months, who knows what may not happen? Calm yourself, my friend, and we shall see."

An oath burst from the American's pale, writhing lips. With a sudden, passionate outburst of strength, which he hardly dreamed lay in him—stark-mad with baffled hopes and overstrung nerves—he flung himself suddenly on Il Vecchio.

The old man, before he could turn or strike, or even cry for help, found his breath cut clean off by the twisting grip of the American on his shirt-collar. It was a trick Dennison had learned long years before in college-hazing days. And now, unthought of for decades, it served his purpose.

Il Vecchio struggled, choked, gasped, and flung up both arms. The golden vial flew wide, clanked dully on the cement, and rolled away.

Dennison, with one final upsurge of strength, hurled the strangling patriarch sprawling over on the work-bench, stunned and breathless, amid a crashing wreck of apparatus.

Then, with catlike agility, he sprang to where the little flask lay, dented, near the sink.

A second, and he caught it up.

"Life! *Life!*" he shrilled with the cackling laughter of a madman.

And twisting off the cap, at one quick draft he drained the vial to its last clear golden drop.

CHAPTER VI

THE BIRTH OF A MYSTERY

FINE, subtle as the wandering topmost notes of a cathedral organ—warm, tingling, and elusive—instinct with potent, vital forces far beyond the range of human words, the Alkahest burned its way down the American's throat.

Staggering back a step or two, he stood there; one hand supported him against the wall, the other clutched his breast. In his face the color came and went. He gasped; his eyes closed, then opened in a wild, half-terrified stare; and all at once a quivering, an uncontrollable tremor, violent and sudden, possessed his body. Giddy and reeling, he clutched the table. There for a moment he clung, blinded and dazed; while round and round him the laboratory seemed to spin in grotesque, exaggerated flight.

But through his half-consciousness a dim perception now began to force itself. Distorted, far-off appearing, unreal as in a dream, he saw the figure of Il Vecchio struggle up from where he had been hurled. Came a moment's blankness, with flickering mental image like kinetoscope pictures from a torn and "rainy" film. In his ears sounded a buzzing, a roaring that waxed and waned—a thundering like sea-caves in storm; then a huge inertia seemed to overcome all thought, all feeling and emotion.

All at once dazzling lights spread before his vision—strange phantasmagorias of the retina. They drew to an intensely brilliant ring, then burst outward in flying shreds of glory. Tense as wire, a band seemed closing round his brain.

He felt that he was falling.

With a cry he opened his eyes. His sight grew steady. The noises rang away in dying echoes, vanished and left him in what seemed a huge, hollow sphere of silence. A new, strange quality of being quivered through his flesh. The visions disappeared. He found himself, gasping, wide-eyed, staring about him in the subterranean room.

"Doctor! Dr. Pagani—where—" he managed to pant with tingling throat and lips.

No answer.

Both hands grasping his head, he glared about.

"Oh, doctor!" he cried again. For now he caught sight of Il Vecchio. "What—what are you—doing?"

Still the Italian made no reply. He had slid off the work-bench, and now, tottering, moaning, bent half double, was dragging himself toward the steel door that gave exit from the laboratory.

Dennison perceived that the aged man was weeping. Through the gnarled fingers which sprawled unsteadily over Il Vecchio's face, he caught the glint of tears by the strange purple light overhead.

"Doctor!"

Il Vecchio merely quickened his pace. Helping himself along by clinging to benches and tables, he seemed—in spite of his anguish and the physical injury which Dennison had inflicted on him—

determined to reach that door immediately.

Why? For what sinister purpose?

A keen wonder, followed by a dreadful fear, sobered the American.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried, reeling after Il Vecchio.

Instinctively he knew that, once the steel door should close upon him, the laboratory would become his prison-cell, a living tomb where he, perhaps for years and years, might vainly beat his hands, unheeded, against the walls of masonry; an oubliette whence nevermore his voice could reach the outer world.

What agonies—what mad, ingenious tortures—might not this aged scientist devise? Confidence violated, life-work negatived and swept away in one brief second by stark treachery, what vengeance too horrible to pay the debt?

And, sick with sudden terror, Dennison made a staggering run after the Italian.

"Stop! Hear me! Stop!" he screamed.

Il Vecchio whirled upon him.

The old man stood transformed. His eyes glared, catlike, in his unnaturally pale face. Across his cheek glowered a dull red welt, where something had struck him as he had fallen across the bench. Through the trembling mustache and beard showed the worn teeth; and the veined fist, upraised, vibrated with impotent passion.

Dennison, horribly aghast, even despite the complex of strange sensations that burned within him, started back at sight of the old man.

Head lowered and thrust forward, one shoulder turned toward Il Vecchio, the other drawn back to give the clenched fist more impact if a blow were needed, Dennison stood there face to face with the man he had so brutally outraged.

Conventions all swept clean away, every scrap and shred of civilized veneer stripped from their naked souls, they glared upon each other, man against man, with only brute strength the arbiter between them.

Thus for a moment they remained, guest and host, betrayer and betrayed.

No word from either. In the laboratory no sound save the bubbling of the reactions, the *drip-drip* of the filter, the panting breath of these two human creatures, which for a second had reverted to the beast, across ten million years of time. No word, no sound. Yet to Dennison it seemed as though the rapid throbbing of his heart filled the whole room with hammer-blows. He choked, gasped, tried to speak, and could accomplish nothing.

AGAIN Il Vecchio turned toward the door.

"You—you lay a finger on that knob," gasped the American with a supreme effort, "and by Heaven I'll—I'll brain you!"

He snatched up a heavy earthen jug from the bench. He gripped it in a hand which, though still tremulous, now felt a strength unknown for years.

"Well?" he demanded. "You hear? Make one move to lock me in and down you go—forever!"

And he took a sudden menacing step toward Il Vecchio.

The patriarch stood erect to meet him. Their eyes clashed. Dennison's hand tightened on the handle of the jug till his knuckles whitened.

"So, then," sneered Il Vecchio, his face strange and wan under that vibrant purple glow, "so then, *this* is American honor?"

Raising his head, he crossed his arms upon his panting breast.

"I—you—" Dennison began, but the old man lifted a hand for silence.

"So this is your payment for my confidence? I trust you, and you—you rob me of all—everything. Then, having taken life, you threaten death. Why, when—"

"No matter about that," retorted Dennison passionately, a strong intoxication possessing him so that he reeled where he stood. "No matter." And, shaken by his own pulses, he raised the weapon over his head. "You aren't going to lock me in here like a rat in a box! You understand? So don't—don't you try it! Out I go—*now!*"

"Fool!" spat Il Vecchio. "One word to my Lombard, and he tears you up and flings you over the cliff as I might tear and throw away waste-paper! Your safety as my guest demands—"

"My safety! Ha—ha! Much that concerns you now. Let me pass!"

You have eaten beneath my roof," retorted the old man. "Now—alas!—I—I with my own hands—I cannot take your life!"

"Are you going to let me out of here, or aren't you?" howled Dennison once more, racked by a periodic spasm of the drug.

Il Vecchio, not answering, remained silent a moment as in thought. Then, with a sudden, quick determination, he burst into a laugh—strange, discordant, unnatural.

"As you will!" he exclaimed. "So be it! Better thus it may be, after all. Not for man, the mere toy and puppet of nature, to judge a crime like this against her laws and to avenge it. This should be for nature herself. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.' Let my god, which is science, judge between you and me."

"Out! Out of here!"

"Out, yes; out of this hidden room, a free, untrammeled man!" Il Vecchio replied. "It is for you to guard the monstrous secret. As for *me*"—and with an added dignity he drew himself up—"neither by word nor sign shall I betray it to a living soul. The problem now is yours to solve, mine to observe. I cannot violate the inborn traditions of my race; nor would I if I could. Remain with me; still be my guest. Come!"

And, his face a study of inexplicable, hidden motives, he threw open the door into the study.

"Pass freely," he said.

Dennison eyed him suspiciously a moment, as though fearing some ruse against which he must be on guard. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders and a wry smile, he dropped the earthen jug.

Speaking no word, shaken with alternate chills and hot flashes which set the blood boiling in his arteries, he strode unsteadily past the Italian.

When he was in the study Il Vecchio also emerged. Locking the door carefully behind him, he turned and faced the fever-racked American. Dennison saw new lines, strange portents in that aged face.

But it was with a smile—though the old man's lips were pale and trembling—that he said:

"To speak of right, of wrong, or of forgiveness, becomes absurd and wholly banal at such a crisis. This problem bulks too vast for mere petty conventions. There," and he pointed toward the fast-locked door of steel, "there and in your own body lies the riddle; there lie the secret and the answer. Only the future can declare the ends of justice."

"I—I—what do you mean?" Dennison beseeched hoarsely, taking a step toward him. He staggered in his tracks as he stood there. Only by a strong effort could he hold himself upright.

"Please leave me now," Il Vecchio commanded. "Go to your room and rest, and think. Then—"

"But—"

"No. I cannot talk with you. Let all this be between us for a while, as though it had not been. Perhaps," he added, waving a hand in stern dismissal, "perhaps we both may have many and strange things to leafn."

CHAPTER VII

THE DAWN OF LIFE

DENNISON, with a set, staring face, turned and blundered out of the study. Unsteady, dazed, he groped his way upstairs and sought his room. With a shaking hand he shot the bolt; he stumbled across the floor, and, spent with emotion, fell upon the great four-posted bed.

For some moments he lay huddled in a singular heap, face buried in his hands. A thousand disjointed images, thoughts, hopes, doubts, questionings flitted across the screen of his consciousness, weaving into strange forms, changing, dissolving, recombining like the colors of a huge kaleidoscope. And all this time—pulsing, tingling, burning through his every fiber, cell, and tiniest capillary—the subtle essence of the Alkahest worked on.

There came a moment of lucidity. The American sat up.

"Where am I?" he suddenly exclaimed. "What has happened? *Ah!*"

He sprang up and fell to pacing the tiled floor. An idea struck him.

"Rest. Sleep, at all hazards. I must have it, or I shall go mad!"

He ran to his little satchel. Snapping it open, in haste before another paroxysm of the Elixir should engulf him, he quickly rummaged out a few small bottles—some potent remedies he had bought on the way, to quell his extreme and growing neurasthenia.

Choosing one, he poured out a stiff dose and gulped it.

"Now," he cried, "for at least a few hours' oblivion! If I live, I live. If I die, this is the last time I need ever drug myself to sleep. Either way, so be it!"

He pulled the shutters—for late afternoon had not yet given place to dusk—and, quickly undressing, slipped into his

pajamas. A moment later, he was in bed.

But, though he composed himself to slumber, nothing came of it. The well-known effects of the powerful opiate failed utterly to supervene. Instead, he broke into a fine, cold sweat; then fever burned him, and in half delirium he tossed an hour or more. Again through his mind passed the solemn warning of Il Vecchio:

"You do not understand the nature of this thing. Ah, my impetuous friend, by the shades of Hermes Trismegistus, you know not what you ask."

With an oath he sprang up. He doubled the dose of narcotic. No result. All through his body seemed to be working, infiltrating, seeping, some strong and unknown force.

"Merciful Heaven, can't I analyze this problem?" Dennison cried, pressing a hand to his throbbing head. "Here I am, a physician. Here's some undiscovered factor of anabolism; can't I grasp it? What have I done? What—*what?*"

And again pacing the floor, he tried to collect his scattered thoughts.

All in vain. His attempts were futile as those of a drunken man. Now there flashed across his mind dazzling perceptions, only to be followed—before he could order and arrange his ideas—by a huge, monstrous charivari of disorder.

Now came a vision of the girl in the pergola, serious and sweet; again, a wild desire to flee, to leave the aged doctor, the mountain-top, France itself; to return home at topmost speed, there to fight out this battle amid familiar surroundings; still again, a great and numbing fear of quitting the place, lest unforeseen, hideous contingencies befall.

Then, last of all, came darkness and pain and wildly disordered dreams.

Thus passed a time, how long he could not tell; but all at once Dennison came to clear consciousness. He found himself standing before the mirror which was let into the door of his clothes-cabinet, with a lighted candle in his hand.

He realized that he was gazing fixedly, into his own wide, staring eyes, of which the pupils were unnaturally dilated, like a self-hypnotizer at his mystic, soul-destroying task. For a moment he stood, peering like this. Then a sharp cry escaped his lips.

"Great Heavens! *What?*" he gasped.

And suddenly, realizing the truth, he fell a-trembling with a sick madness of joy; like a miser, perhaps, who might by chance have stumbled on the secret of transmuting lead to gold.

For already—already—he could see a change! Yes, slight though it was, an alteration, distinct and unmistakable!

"My eyes—my eyes are different!" he panted, leaning forward in a passion of eagerness, the candle shaking in his hand till hot wax dropped and spattered on the floor. "My hair—see!—and those deep lines in the forehead! Half obliterated! And—oh!—and the cheek—fuller—the—the—"

His teeth chattered as though he had been flung into an icy bath. He staggered, catching for breath. The candle fell from its holder. Extinguished, it left the bedchamber in a soft darkness.

Dennison perceived that night had come. He felt, too, that he was stifling. The indoor air seemed to choke and sicken him. It was as though the turning tides of life—the new, mystic, up-springing flame within him—demanded oxygen, free and pure, without stint or limit.

He staggered to the window, feeling before him like a blind man—for, indeed, at that first moment of realization he could hardly see—and with one wild, impatient gesture flung open the shutters. Then, holding to the jamb, he breathed in great lungfuls of the cool night air. And through him, like a living fire, he felt the mingled oxygen and essence of the Alkahest run swiftly, gloriously, in sovereign power over weakness, suffering, and death.

For a while he stood there, asking no more, wishing no other thing, content merely to be alive, to feel the old dead weight of disease, of fear, of pain momentarily dropping from him.

Could you by any magic of telepathy feel what the dragon-fly must feel when, crawling in the heavy, foul inertia of its larval stage up to some lakeside pebble, it sheds this filthy covering and emerges, free, out into the sunlight and sweet summer air—soon to spread gossamer wings and flick its lightning way over the shining surface of the pool—could you understand such a metamorphosis as that, you might perhaps know something of what Dennison felt as he stood there at the open window.

OUT over the wide, fair garden-spaces he looked, with eyes no longer dim or aching. The moon, he saw, was poised

in a bright, lucent sickle high above the olive-trees, which, weird in the half-light, raised their twisted limbs distorted like the souls drawn by Doré for the "Inferno."

Beyond, a glimmer of wavering silver bespoke the presence of the sea. A little green light, very far and small, crept slowly westward—a craft of some sort—perhaps a steamer bound for far America.

And as he looked upon it, and on all this calm, pure, southern night, flooded with the faint moonbeams and made vocal by the nightingales in the orange-grove along the cliff, a sudden gush of tenderness for life, for beauty, a wave of unutterable gratitude swept over his soul.

Forgotten in a second, now, the reason whereby he had profited. Forgotten the stern problems of his future, of his place there in the household of the wronged scientist. Forgotten all but this—that life, life again was coming back to him! Life and the fullness thereof! With all its promise, all its hope and joy once more, replacing the dead husks and ashes of approaching age!

And, overwhelmed by his tremendous ecstasy, such as never before in the whole world's history had been known to man, or ever shall be known, Dennison sank on his knees before the window.

There in the strip of moonlight he knelt. He bowed his head. He hid his face in both shaking hands. The eyes that for long, long years had known no weeping, now grew hot with tears. The soul which for decades had felt no up-gushing impulse to prayer, voiced an inarticulate cry to the night, the wind, the sea—to nature, nurse and mother and all-wise guardian of human weaklings.

Thus for a while the American remained there, his thoughts too deep, too burning with intensity, too poignant for translation into words.

Then, humbled yet exalted, trembling with eagerness yet conscious of a vague, half-formulated fear, he rose. More calmly now he looked abroad upon the night. And, since no thought of sleep at such a time could even lodge within his brain, the idea came to him that he might walk down through the garden as far as the cliff, to sit and think and plan what should be done.

"Yes," said he, half aloud, "if this be not all a dream, if this be reality and not some mad deception of the drug tonight marks an epoch in the story of the human race. I, I in my own living person, am experiencing the miracle which all the alchemists have sought in vain; which lured Ponce de Leon to the everglades of Florida; which for three thousand years has danced, an intangible will-o'-the-wisp—elusive and death-dealing—before the dreamers of the world."

And, dazed by the magnitude of his imaginings, he stepped out onto the iron balcony before his window.

Leaning over, he saw stout trellis-work up which the clematis and ivy ran. Hastily he dressed. Then down the trellis, with an agility, a vigor which he had not known for years, he swung himself; and presently—pushing his way through dense, perfumed thickets of oleander—came out into the graveled path that led to the cliff.

Here, in fresh wonder, he stopped again.

"Can it be?" he exclaimed, standing there bare-headed and with garments in disarray, the moon casting his wan shadow out before him. "Can this be true? Am I really Dr. Granville Dennison, of New York City?" And, taking out his card-case, he eagerly read his own name upon a bit of pasteboard. Even that proof, dimly visible in the pale light, could hardly convince him. Tranced with the mystery, the wonder of it all, he wandered down the path. He breathed deeply the incense of that tropic night; with ecstasy he listened to the mad, trilling cascades of melody from the orange-grove. Up to the large, white, southern stars he turned his face, where still showed traces of glad tears. And so, walking as perhaps Balder might have done, on his return from the lower regions, he came to the vine-bowered pergola and entered there.

Far below, the threnody of the eternal surf rose, fell, resounded with a rhythmic cadence. He leaned and looked down through the blue air; gleaming in the moonlight he saw the crawling lacery of foam that fingered up, up, then burst in fans of spray and fell, asparkle, back into the restless flood. And suddenly, inexplicably, a huge desire assailed him to plunge, to swim, to battle with the brine there at the base of the huge cluff.

"Crazy? Am I going crazy?" he thought, shrinking back from the sheer thousand-foot drop. "That would mean

death! And life, for me, is just beginning once again!"

Shuddering a trifle, he retreated. For a moment he stood looking through the garden. Peace, calm and tenderly benignant, brooded over the world. Far through the groves, a dull black shadow betrayed the presence of the house. All was dark there, save for one tiny clink of light in an upper window. This slit of radiance glimmered fitfully and eerily through the half-obscurity.

"Il Vecchio's room?" he thought. "Or maybe Stasia's?" And recollection stabbed him. For a brief instant he realized the enormity, the horrible treason of his deed. But only for an instant. The fresh-pulsing tides of life within his veins seemed by their very intensity to banish retrospection. His thought refused to dwell upon the past. As oil withdraws from water, so his mind slid from regrets or self-accusation. It was as though the past were dead and only the present, the future, endowed with the essence of reality.

"That's over and gone!" he cried, raising both arms on high, his face to heaven. "Done! Irrevocable! From now on, life! Life anew! Life eternal, indestructible! Life, and love, and happiness beyond the dreaming of the human soul!"

CHAPTER VIII

DOWN THE PRECIPICE

"DAWN, glowing in turquoise and crimson over the sea, found him transfigured and aglow with wondrous hopes, with keen, delicious, intoxicating foretastes of immortality; the name of Stasia on his lips, her memory and magic in his heart.

As the lighthouse on Les Saintes-Maries, far up the curving coast, ceased its intermittent stabbing gleam, and as the gray sea-mists rolled up in billowing golden fleece before the sun, once more that passionate longing possessed the American to try his returning strength in the surf.

"No, no, this is mere madness," he exclaimed, trying to quiet the desire. "Why, these twenty years past I haven't even so much as ventured to dip in salt water! I've had to confine myself to tepid splashings in porcelain—and even those only in the greatest moderation. What am I thinking of? I, who only yesterday was a dying man!"

Pacing the length of the pergola, he sought to banish his unruly thoughts. Yet they would not down in spite of him.

"Why not?" the question still recurred. He stopped and looked at his hands. Surely, these were quite different from the meager, flabby things of yesterday! The morning light showed them already filled out—firm, strong, like those of a man in his prime. Dennison stripped up his sleeve.

"Ah!" he breathed in overwhelmed surprise. He doubled his biceps, clenched his fist, and stood there a moment, working his regenerated fingers, to watch the play and interplay of the cords and tendons.

Wide-eyed, he stared in frightened realization of the miracle. Too new, too strange yet for it to have won through the realms of firm belief. Still he half doubted. "*Can* it be?" he cried. "Science denies it, the whole world scoffs at it—yet it *is!*"

He tore open his shirt, felt of his breast and shoulders, made the muscles flex, relax, and crawl; bent his legs and straightened them; then, in a wild burst of exultation, cried again: "It is! No dream—no dream! Reality!"

He looked abroad across the sea, where now a tiny laten-sail or two, outcreeping, bespoke the early morning fisher fleet just starting from the harbor to eastward. The heave and murmur of the always-summer ocean called him more strongly than before. Its fascination grew irresistible.

Already in imagination he could feel the cool embraces of the surf, the buoyant, vigorous thrust and parry of the clashing breakers, the jetting spray, the tang of brine.

"I must!" he cried. "Only once more, as long ago, the sea!"

Again he peered across the rail, in the now strengthening light, judging if there were any way to reach the bottom of that dizzying cliff.

"There!" he exclaimed, his sharpened vision descrying a tiny, broken path which, clinging to the face of the perpendicular rock, wound out of sight around its farther curves.

Here it appeared, there vanished, further on again became once more visible. Whether it led to the bottom, whether it was continuous or broken by

impassable gaps, he could not tell. He had no means of even knowing that it *was* a path for human feet; of surety that, once half-way down, it might not crumble under him and hurl him headlong down, down to mangled annihilation.

Yet all this did not count with him. Again there thrilled and burned within his heart the strong, adventurous spirit, the lure of the unknown, the perilous, which for long years had lain buried and forgotten.

And, already determined, he left the summerhouse. Along the brow of the cliff he quested in the dawn, seeking the

His soul was riven by the frightful truth. "*Coffins!*" he screamed

embouchure of the tiny path.

Far down toward the eastern boundary wall of the estate; beyond a mulberry thicket and a patch of barren, boulder-strewn ground, he discovered it—a mere cleft in the rock, long since unused by even the feet of the hardy native goats.

It gave him pause a moment; but with a smile, an impatient snapping of the fingers, he set foot upon the perilous descent. Moment by moment, though not since the fruit and wine brought him in his room by the Lombard had he eaten anything, the strength of manhood was returning in him. He wrenched a sapling from its rooted hold upon the cliff-edge, broke it with naked hands to a convenient length, and—thus supplied with an alpenstock—started down.

For a few minutes all went well. Undizzied by the vast emptiness below him, unterrified by the uncertain footing and by the jagged towers of the cliff-wall that shot up, overhanging, at his right hand, down, down, down he kept.

From time to time he lashed out gaily with his stick at a flaunting red or yellow bloom clinging upon the lip of the

abyss. The beheaded flower, spinning away from his sight, amused him. The task of picking his dangerous way gratified his sense of exuberant vitality, delighted him. Long a brain-worker and an invalid, unused—since the far-distant days of his athletic youth—to any physical exertion, now he felt reviving in him a thousand forgotten satisfactions in the use of muscle, nerve, and skill.

The daring judgment of every step, the firm hold of his clutching fingers on the cliff, the clear-headed defiance of the nothingness below him, and of the jagged, waiting rocks, were like oil upon the fire of his great excitement.

IN THIS unusual, needless peril, the new vitality that, like a living flame, was growing in and through him found vent. And, now clinging to a jut of the volcanic graystone, now peering into the vague depths, again leaping a break in the path, crawling on all-fours across some narrow, crumbling causeway, flushing up a gull from its rocky nest, or letting himself slide bodily from ledge to ledge, so great a happiness thrilled him that song welled to his lips.

Reechoing from the rugged face of rock, out rolled that devil-may-care student melody from "Faust", summing up in long-forgotten words the cycle of the joys of youth:

"Good beer, a maiden smartly dressed,
Stinging tobacco—these I love the best!"

Startled by the sound of his own voice, he stopped suddenly with a strange cry.

"Why—what's that?" he exclaimed. "Is this I myself? What? Am I dreaming, or dead and resurrected, or a ghost—or crazy—or what the blazes *am* I? Less than twenty-four hours ago I, a spent old man—why, I crept up a decent enough road, breathless, my heart ready to burst. And now—now—"

For a moment he stood still, his feet braced against the outer edge of the pathway, peering down with bold yet startled eyes into the void. Then he passed a hand over his face.

"Well, no matter," he laughed suddenly. "As Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I exist.' Let it go at that. Whoever I really am, that doesn't matter. Nothing matters, hang it," he added with sudden eagerness, "except that cold salt plunge!"

And once more he started down the perilous trace that once had marked a path down the abyss.

From now the way was growing rougher and more difficult. Fallen masses of stone, from far above, had here blocked the way, there broken it entirely, so that he was forced to extraordinary efforts to continue downward. Once or twice he paused, with still some hundreds of feet gaping below him, uncertain whether after all it were not the part of reason to return. But his fixed determination still drove him on and on.

"I've said it, and I will!" he swore through clenched teeth, his face all beaded with sweat, grimed with dust and dirt from the precipice, his hands bruised and torn with the terrific labor. "I will—that settles it!"

At last, however, he came against a veritable cul-de-sac on the way. Beyond a break in the path, some feet in width, it seemed as though the narrow ledge abutted in an outcrop, beyond which no passage showed itself.

Puzzled, Dennison stood still. What should he do? Give up? Climb back that toilsome way, without having attained his object? Admit himself beaten in this, his first endeavor since the Alkahest had been his?

"Never!" he cried. "Here goes!"

And, not even knowing whether in case of failure he could get back at all, he measured the distance, leaped, and for a moment tottered desperately upon the crumbling edge, beyond.

One sick, dizzy moment he felt that he was overbalanced, that he must fall. But, desperately clutching at the face of the great wall, his fingers found a hold.

He steadied himself. Grunting with exertion, he drew himself to safety.

"Now what?" he cried, exulting in the strife of his new powers, the battle between himself and the waiting crags below.

SWABBING his forehead, he advanced along the narrow way toward the outcrop where it seemed to terminate. Then, with a cry of sheer astonishment, he stopped.

"What?" he exclaimed. He bent forward. "What's that?"

There in the face of the cliff, masked by a tangle of wild aloes that had struck root into a cleft, he saw a dark, narrow opening.

Across it hung the remains of what must at one time have been a stout door. From staples let into the rock, an iron frame sagged drunkenly. Some of the bars had rusted wholly through; others still held. And to these adhered a few worm-eaten scraps of oak, pierced with rivets. The wreckage of a padlock lolled in mockery at one side of the now defenceless aperture.

On the pathway, below the door, bits of iron had gathered, where the rain had washed them clean at the same time that it had carried off the detritus of rotting wood. Beyond this little pile the path extended less than three feet, ending in a moraine of rubbish along the jutting ridge. Dennison perceived at once that now his way was definitely blocked. Puzzled, he stood there a moment in contemplation.

"How now?" he cried, peering at the door. "What the deuce does *this* mean?"

Holding to one of the iron staples, he bent, thrust his head in, and squinted round. By the vague light that illuminated the vicinity of the door he perceived a rough-hewn flight of steps leading downward, parallel to the face of the cliff. A dozen or so were visible; beyond, darkness swallowed them.

"Well, I'll be—" he exclaimed. "What next?"

He stood up again, and, still keeping his hold upon the iron, looked down the surface of the precipice.

No way to climb down farther—that was plain. The path was quite obliterated; and, besides, the rocky wall here overhung, so that by no means, except by a rope, could any human creature descend.

Away below him, beckoning, calling, he could see the blue rollers as they creamed in crawling windrows of surf along the base of the titanic wall.

"It's down those stairs, or not at all!" he said decisively. "Hang it, what's the matter with my eyes? Seems like a blur, or something!"

Then suddenly he understood the cause of the uneasiness which, till now only half perceived, had for the last hour or two been making him blink and squint.

"My glasses!" he exclaimed. And as he spoke he snatched them off impatiently. "Ah, now that's better; *now* I can see!" With a broad smile he gazed about him, holding the glasses in his hand the while.

Then, actuated by a sudden impulse, he flung them far out into space. He watched them spin, twinkle, flash as they fell.

"Drat you!" he cried, as they vanished into the sea. "You've given me your last day's bother! And you, too, and you!" he added, dragging from his pocket first a blue bottle, then a brown one. These likewise he hurled away with angry force.

The glitter of the hurtling bottles was grateful to his eyes as they whirled in a vast arc through the sunlit morning air. The pill-box cover spun off; he saw a scatter of white pellets. Surprised at the keenness, the accuracy, of his vision, he uttered a cry of, "Splendid! Fine!" and faced the direct sunlight.

These rays, level with the heaving bosom of the sea, already burned with southern ardor. But he did not squint.

"Why," he wondered, "this is the first time in—in Lord knows how many years that I've been able to look Old Sol in the face!"

From somewhere out there in the tides he heard a faint *plop, plop!*

"Eh? What's that?" he exclaimed. "Oh, those infernal medicine-bottles! Good riddance for me; worse luck for the fish, as Dr. Holmes well said. But—I—I *heard* them? At that distance? Great heavens! It's true—true as I'm alive. And only yesterday I couldn't have heard a horse fall in from here."

Marveling, thrilled with the miracle, the glory, the ecstatic wonder of it all, he raised his regenerated arms to the sun, as though he had been a Parsee fire-worshiper.

Then, turning, he crept through the little door and started down the rough-cut stairs of stone.

CHAPTER IX

LOST

DUSTY, festooned with fly-filled webs, the way led downward steeply but with no great difficulty. Dennison judged, from the primitive cutting, that the steps were of vast antiquity, dating perhaps from far back in pre-Roman times when Phenician traders had been tempting prey for the pirate hordes which once infested these rocky coasts.

But he had scant time for any such considerations. For hardly had he descended a score of steps, hoping he might

meet other openings cut through for light, when he perceived that the stairs veered sharply to the right. Thus, darkness absolute enveloped them.

"H-m! What is it now?" thought the American.

He looked back. There above him he could still see a blotch of light from the doorway. A vague illumination grayed down the steps, but around the corner it ceased.

"Lord knows what pitfalls may exist below!" he said tentatively. "No use being positively reckless, just as everything's commencing. Some way or other, I've got to have a light!"

He reflected a moment, his heart beating a trifle fast, dilated pupils staring down in a vain attempt to fathom the invisible.

Then, "Ah, I have it!" he exclaimed. Hastily he pulled from his inner coat-pocket a sheaf of papers and personalia.

"The very thing!"

From among them he chose a long, rather thin book, bound in red leather—a costly treatise, stamped in gold letters: "Dietetics and Senility, by H. K. Hoffman-Browne, A. M., MD." The other papers he replaced.

"Deuce take him and his musty old asceticism, too," Dennison growled as he ripped the hundred-odd pages clean out of the binding, which he flung away. "I've got a better use for all this poppycock now than to read it!"

Speaking, he rolled a couple of the leaves into a spill. This be quickly lighted with a match from his silver case; and now, for the moment provided with a feeble though sufficient light, he continued downward.

The spill guided him down a dozen steps or more. When it was burned almost out he lit a fresh leaf. And so, one by one, burning the pages of this most erudite monograph—which but the day before had been like Holy Writ to him—he then made good progress.

Presently he began to note a chill in the dead air, a damp and sickly odor. The walls grew patched with leprous fungi. On the stairs a slippery moisture increased as he went down. Here, there, through some vein or fault in the volcanic rock, seeping water made weird, discolored patches, sulfurous and slimy.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, disgusted, lighting still another paper. "This place hasn't been visited for centuries. Small wonder! Next time I start for a sea-bath I'll go round some way or other. Nice place, isn't it? I'm rather glad, on the whole, there's not much more of it ahead!"

Down, still down, he kept. He must have made some hundred and fifty steps or more, when all at once he perceived a little draft of air. Slight, almost unnoticeable at first, yet it attracted his attention by flickering the flame of his improvised torch. He paused, sniffing. A musty smell came to his sharpened senses.

"H-m!" he thought. "That can't be any sea air, working up through this passage!" And for a moment he remained there, attentive, wondering, while the raw flame cast his dancing shadow grotesquely against the fetid walls.

Again he went on. Then all at once he saw whence this air current came. Off to the right and below him, opening down into the stairway at an angle so obtuse that it was almost parallel, he saw the dim, uncertain mouth of another stair.

"What?" he cried, startled. "So, then, this cliff is worm-eaten with runways like a rabbit-hutch? *That's* odd! Why—why, there may be dozens of them!"

A FEW steps lower down he came to the entrance of the other stairway. But though he lighted half a dozen pages at once, and held the flambeau high above his head, he could make little of it. Just a dark, curving, sinister cleft in the rock, entirely similar to the one wherein he stood, and, like it, leading upward. So—since his supply of paper was far from unlimited—he wasted no more time on speculation.

"No matter, after all, where it goes or doesn't go," he told himself. "I'm after that salt bath; and if this stair ever gets to the bottom of the cliff I'm going to have it!"

Down, down, down he clambered. Now the other passageway lay very far behind. Now the drip and moisture were rapidly increasing.

"How much farther, I'd like to know?" exclaimed the doctor.

Another turn. Then, quite suddenly, he whiffed the freshness of outer air. To his ears penetrated a dull, muffled, booming ebb and flow of sound, seemingly far away, murmuring idly like the echo in a conch.

"Ah!" exclaimed Dennison, and hastened on. Five minutes later he emerged, blinking in the sudden light of day, from a cleft at the base of the precipice. Before him lay a tiny cove, let into the massive crag; here, there, pools among the rocks reflected the calm sky, while over an outer ledge of rocks, in periodic ebb and flow, the surges tumbled in bursting chaos of white, hissing beauty.

Dennison lost scant time in admiration. Hastily reconnoitering the spot, he flung off his clothes, and a moment after stood there, naked and glad, glorying in the new power of his arms, the fresh, returning vigor of his frame.

Exclamations of wonder and delight burst from his lips as, with the trained observation of a doctor, he took note of the rounded contours which but so short a time before had been hollowed, scrawny, despicable. He inflated his chest, he beat upon it with both fists till it resounded like a drum. The excess of oxygen dizzied him. He staggered, drunk with very power.

"Life! Life!" he cried.

Then, clambering up a wave-worn mass of rock that rose amid the surf, he plunged. And—all his one-time skill instinctively reverting—he reveled for a full half-hour in the invigorating flood.

Out through the yeasty toss he struck, boldly out toward open sea; he turned and swam back, under water. He let the breakers bear him in, up, up; then, clutching a barnacled rock, clung while the thunderous green surges spilled over him, recoiled, and once more swung him seaward.

Weary a little, he climbed ashore. He sat there by a pool, wherein prawns and claw-fingered little mollusks, star-fish, and hermit crabs were carrying on their tiny businesses. Delighted as a child at play, he dabbled his feet in the miniature lake; he found a bit of driftwood, and with it stirred the denizens to flight or masterly inactivity. Tired of this, he plunged again; and finally, when an hour or so was past, emerged to sit upon a little sandy strip at the end of the cove, where the soft summer breeze dried his glowing body.

"This is the first time, but not the last!" he cried. "Now for a climb back up the cliff again, and breakfast; bacon and eggs, rolls, coffee! Two cups, rich and creamy, ah!" He had tasted none in fifteen years. "Then, one of Il Vecchio's cigars, and—and—I'll be ready for a talk with him. For whatever apologies are due, or—or any adjustment, any arrangement he thinks necessary. And *then*—an hour or two with Stasia in the garden! Paradise enow? Great Scott! Who could ask more?"

Thus reflecting, talking now to himself, now singing a snatch of lively melody, he dressed again.

"H-m! What's the matter with my clothes?" he asked. "This coat's entirely too tight under the arms, too loose around the belt-line, the equator, as it were! These sleeves seem rather skimped, too; and—well—the whole outfit's out of shape. I'll have to take a trip down to Cette in a day or two, and have another wardrobe, if—if this sort of thing keeps on!"

Impatiently he jerked the lapels of his waistcoat, to bring them together over his enlarged chest.

As he did so, a tiny silver flask flicked through the air. He heard a click of metal as his match-box ignited off a huge boulder. There came a quick splash.

"Thunder!" he cried, scrambling after it. "Can't afford to have *that* get wet!"

Wet, however, it was when he recovered it. For by ill luck it had fallen into one of the little pools, far in under a half-ton boulder; and before Dennison could poke it within reach again with his stick, the salt water had seeped in around the spring which controlled the cover.

Anxiously he snapped the match-box open.

WITH an exclamation more of disgust than of alarm, he drew out the matches, one by one. All alike, all ruined. He tried two or three with no success. Beyond producing a disagreeable paste of sulfur and brimstone, which smelled abominably, and sending out a thick white vapor, they remained inert.

Cursing the luck, Dennison got out his remaining sheets of paper, sought a sheltered nook and successively experimented with every match. Should only one ignite, he could then light a sheet and keep the fire going until he could reach the little door halfway up the cliff. But no, never a one would serve. And finally, surrounded by a litter of broken, soggy, useless matches, he stood up and darkly eyed the entrance to the stairway.

"Well, it looks as though I'd have to do it by feeling, that's all," he judged, frowning. Then the frown cleared to a smile. "What does it really matter, after all?" he queried. "Where I've come down, I fancy I can go up! Just a matter of fifteen or twenty minutes' care, that's all. Bah! A trifle!"

He cast a farewell glance about him, at the friendly little cove, the rocks, the sandy strip, the surf and the bright sea, then with confident step entered the narrow slit in the cliff and addressed himself to the long climb through wet and dark and slime, up toward the free air of heaven once more.

The splendid energy that now coursed through him, the keen invigoration of his salt dip, proved by no means superfluous for the great task ahead of him. For now, after that fresh, vital air, the fetid black on the stairway seemed doubly mephitic; the slimy walls along which he had been obliged to feel his way, ten times more repellent. Still, he kept on, along the left-hand wall step by step, working his way upward. And three minutes lengthened into five, five into ten, yet the little door at the top seemed as far off as ever.

All at once, puzzled, he stopped and thought a moment.

"What?" he asked, peering about him, behind him, then in front, as though by any possibility he might make out his situation. "Why haven't I felt that same cross-current of air going up, that I felt in coming down? Surely I must have more than passed the place! And—now that I think of it—this wall, here, isn't as it should be!"

Carefully, with a slightly accelerated heart, a heart that beat a trifle faster than even the exertion of the climb could warrant, he ran his fingers over the invisible wall.

"H-m!" he grunted. "Dry, and granular! Not wet and homogeneous! It's—it *seems*—different, some way. My Lord, what a fool I was not to have looked out for those matches!"

Not yet even admitting to himself the possibility that he could feel uneasiness, he remained there for a full minute, motionless, trying to think.

"What's the matter?" he at last asked aloud. "What *can* be—if anything? Steps. I've followed them. They lead to the door, don't they? Well, then, all I've got to do is go ahead!"

Yet though this seemed indisputable, he did not start. Still he stayed there, a clutching sensation at his heart, while up his spine a little creeping chill began to tingle.

"What?" he cried at last, with sudden fear.

He pressed forward, eagerly feeling, tapping along the walls, hoping for some touch of the wet, sulfurous exudation. But there was none. Distinctly, positively, he now understood that he was in a location where he had never been before.

Then he stopped short.

"Why, where *am* I?" he exclaimed. "I—I don't know! All I know is that this isn't the—right way. And, and—why, then," he choked with a quick taking of the breath, "why, then, I'm—I'm—I *must be lost!* . . ."

CHAPTER X

THE CHAMBER OF THE DEAD

DR. DENNISON had always been one of those analytical, ultrarational men, priding himself upon his powers of reason, his ability to solve a problem by the exercise of his logical, inductive mind.

Yet, even so, when he realized that now he had indubitably strayed into a network of passages honeycombing the mountain, there ran over him a thrill of sick, animal terror very like that of the most stupid, the least reasonable man on earth.

He sat down on one of the stone steps, took a long breath, and—restraining as best he could the instinctive trembling of his body—sought to constrain his mind to approach this question impersonally with calm, deliberate judgment.

"Why," he articulated slowly, "if I—if I've gone astray, it must be that, having no light, and feeling along the left-hand wall I've followed that other passageway or spur through which I felt the draft. Why I don't feel it now, I don't know—provided I'm in it. But that seems the only logical conclusion. If so, all I've got to do is retrace my steps till I come to the original way, and then follow *that* to the top. Nothing simpler!"

It sounded reasonable; yet through it all, the doctor felt a numbing subconscious suspicion that perhaps the execution of this maneuver might not be so simple as it seemed. He sat there in the

velvet black, staring with wide eyes which could detect no smallest ray of light. Even though he passed his hand repeatedly before his face, no sensation resulted. So intense was the night, there in the bowels of Mount St. Clair, that the retinal hallucinations within his eyes were clearly visible—spreading rings and blotches of purple, crimson, and green. Even when he closed his lids, the darkness was no greater.

He started up.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "no use of sitting here. The sooner I get at it the better!"

But before he set out he did a very prudent thing that showed the value of his training, the worth of an educated mind.

"Even if I'm right," he said, "and easily find that other stair, it will do no harm. If I'm wrong, it will be invaluable for me to be able to make my way back here again and take a fresh start from this place. Otherwise, in case there are many passages and stairways, I may get hopelessly involved. I've got to leave some trace, some way of locating my position. And the only way to do *that* is to imitate Theseus in the labyrinth at Crete, and carry a string wherever I go!"

So judging, he sat down once more. Quickly he removed his shoes and socks.

"Lucky," he said, taking the latter in hand, "that my rheumatism demanded coarse wool!" And carefully, with the dexterous fingers of a trained scientist, he cut way the toe-stitch of first one, then the other, with his pocket scissors. Then, most attentively experimenting till he found the right yarn, he began cautiously unraveling.

The socks, hand-knitted from Germantown wool disintegrated softly, easily, with never a drop or flaw in the stitch. As Dennison raveled them, he wound the resulting yarn into a neat ball. Each sock yielded a full hundred yards. Together, they gave him more than six hundred feet of yarn.

"Not so pretty as Ariadne's silken thread," he smiled grimly to himself, "but just as necessary!"

He replaced his shoes, groped about till he found a fair-sized chip of rock scaled from the walls, tied the end of his yarn to this chip; and then, carefully unwinding the ball as he went, started downward again on what he hoped might be a way leading him directly to the passage he sought.

Some minutes passed. Already he had reached and passed the knot in the yarn marking the place where that from one sock had been tied to that from the other. He knew that he had made three hundred feet or so; yet though from time to time he crossed from one wall to the other and felt for any opening, he found none. Still that dry, crystalline structure of the rock continued, nor, feel as carefully as he might, could he discover now the least traces of seepage or of moisture.

PUZZLED beyond all words, a sickening dread now at his soul, he stopped to think again.

"Can I have got into still another offshoot?" he exclaimed thickly, in the intense dark, denser than Egypt's night of plague. "If I have—I'm done for."

It seemed to him, indeed, the steps were flatter, broader, and less worn, here, then he remembered any to have been.

"Where *am* I?" he wailed suddenly, with terror; and, for an instant out of hand, sent yell on yell reverberating through the horrid black.

The echoes died out quickly, deadened by the close, oppressive atmosphere which weighed upon him like a pall of lead.

"On! *On!*" he cried, in the first rush of panic. And, letting the yarn quickly unroll, he stumbled blindly down the curving stairs, blundered along a level "drift," and all at once fetched up with a dazing blow against some solid thing which was not stone.

The impact sent him staggering back, his eyes filled with sparkling darts of fire. But he caught himself; and, bruised though his forehead was, stretched out his arms, his hands, to find this thing once more. As he did so, the woolen thread escaped from his fingers.

This, however, in his excitement he did not perceive. For now, exploring with hands that trembled in their eagerness, he found that the object which barred the end of the passage was of iron—a plate, it seemed, which by the sense of feeling he knew was badly pitted with erosion.

"An iron plate? *Here?*" exclaimed the doctor, his mind a daze.

And, stooping eagerly forward, he explored its surface with shuddering haste.

"Ah! Hinges!"

He felt on the other side.

"A latch!"

He pressed it. For a moment it resisted. Then, exerting his new-found strength, he forced it upward.

He pushed against the plate. It remained fixed. He set his shoulder to it. The plate vibrated; there came a creaking of the hinges.

"Uh!" he grunted, as he hurled himself against it. With a complaining, grinding stridor, the plate swung inward. And though the dark, within, equaled that in the passageway, Dennison knew by the close, stagnant air and by a certain sense of instinctive perception, that he had penetrated into a crypt or chamber in the solid rock.

For a moment he hesitated, there upon the threshold. A sudden fear assailed him lest, inside, there might be some well, some pit of terrifying, unknown depth, waiting sinister and black to swallow him. He listened. Nothing. No drip of water, no sound of moving air—nothing except the thick, fast beating of his own heart, the labored breath between his lips.

Crouching, at first, then down on hands and knees, he crept into the vault. He felt cautiously before him and all about him. No aperture. The floor seemed smooth and uniform, covered here and there by little drifts of an unusually heavy and cohesive dust.

"How big?" asked Dennison aloud. "How big a room? And is there any other opening out of it?"

The quick echoes told him the space was contracted. He crawled forward slowly, cautiously, pausing at almost every foot to feel about him as far as his arms would reach. Nothing obstructed him. Nothing, until his hand once more touched the wall of solid rock.

"I've crossed it, one way," he said, now calmer. "I'll see how big it is!" And, following the wall, he crept along.

All at once he found no wall.

"Another passage?" he exclaimed. "Maybe a way out—up—to light and air!"

He turned and crept into this seeming passage. But almost at once he found his way barred. The passage turned out to be a sort of niche, or alcove, cut in one side of the crypt.

"What now?"

Out went his hand again.

"What?"

It recoiled as though from a cold reptile. For, startled, Dennison recognized that he had touched a plank, a box, or casket of wood.

Waiting a second, vainly peering straight ahead of him, he once more laid hands on the box. It proved to be of some smooth, solid wood. He stood up, and, bending over it, explored its whole upper surface.

"So?" he commented, strong curiosity almost overcoming his anguished fear. "Six feet long, I should judge. Maybe two and a half or three wide. Strongly screwed together. Ah! What's this?"

At one end, affixed with small tacks, he perceived a thin metal plate, some two inches square. Running his finger-nail over this, he discovered that the surface of the plate was scratched with lines, though what they meant he could form no remotest idea. And for a moment, having now learned all that could be determined about his singular find, he straightened up and stood there ruminating.

"Can't get it. Don't understand! Treasure? Heavens above! If I had a screw-driver now, I'd soon— Hello! What the deuce?"

For, as he spoke, he took a step backward; and now, quite suddenly, he found himself sprawling on his back, legs higher than his head, supported by something invisible.

Quickly he scrambled up, unhurt.

"Another?"

He hastily examined it.

Like the first, it was strongly put together and bore a metal plate tacked at one end.

"Any more?" asked Dennison, in fast-rising excitement.

And, cautiously feeling before him, he crouched along.

"Number three!" he announced. "This one's smaller. And—another! Smaller still!"

Forgetting his previous fear of pits in the floor, he crept quickly along the row of boxes.

"Here's one—and here—and here!" he panted, a new, strange uneasiness gaining possession of his heart. "How many, I'd like to know? Smaller and smaller—eight, nine—this one's no longer than a woman—a small woman—here's some child-sizes— Twelve—fifteen of 'em—eighteen in all! Why, a baby'd go in the last one!"

He staggered back, mind and soul riven by the frightful truth, realized in a lightning-flash of intuition.

"Coffins!" he screamed, and then shivering, he stood there gasping, staring wide-eyed at the unseen horror.

CHAPTER XI

A STRANGE EXIT

PHYSICIAN though he was, well-used to sights and sounds of ghastly import, Dennison for a minute or two felt himself sickened with terror by his gruesome discovery. It is one thing to deal with death professionally, impersonally; another, to find oneself confronted unexpectedly, suddenly and in the dark of an unknown cavern, with a long, horrible row of wooden caskets.

But even so, Dennison's fright lasted hardly the space of a hundred heartbeats. Then his natural courage reasserted itself. The revivified force that now pulsed through his veins gave him strength for any problem, any task. And, folding his arms as he stood there in the impenetrable night, he pondered.

"What does it mean?" he thought. "Who are these people? Why are they here? Does Il Vecchio know of them? Could *he*, by any possibility—"

A sudden, illuminating suspicion darted through his mind.

"*What?*" he exclaimed. "Why, in that case, maybe I—understand some things!"

And now, all aquiver to learn more, far more of this ghastly mystery, he once again approached the coffins.

Quite calmly now, with careful and trained mind applied intently to the problem, he again felt the caskets, one by one, from end to end of the row.

Yes, there were certainly eighteen of them, grading from large to small, and each bearing a metallic plate. Passing his fingers over the tops of the coffins, he determined that some were far more recent than others. The wood of several had, despite the dryness of the cavern, begun to molder a little. These, he inferred, were much the oldest, though by how many years he could of course form no idea.

Having determined his point, he set himself to examine the plates.

"Perhaps," he thought, "there may be some clue here." But he could discover nothing. The scratches on them, if indeed these formed letters and inscriptions, were too shallow, too fine for him to read by the mere sense of touch.

So, after many fruitless efforts he abandoned the attempt.

"I'll take two or three of them along with me, anyhow," he decided. "They may be useful—in case I ever get out of here. If I don't, no harm's done."

With his stout pocket-knife he carefully and laboriously pried the nails from three of the plates. One blade broke, but he persisted with the other. It was a matter of perhaps twenty minutes to dig the plates clear, but he stuck to the job, and after a time had them safely pocketed. With excellent judgment he chose one from the largest, one from the smallest, and one from a medium-sized casket.

"These," he meditated, "ought to give me some idea of the contents of them all. I wonder if I couldn't find out *now?*"

He was half minded to attack one of the caskets with his knife. But a moment's reflection convinced him that with no other tool than this the task would be tremendously difficult.

Time, too, was passing. The prisoner seemed as far as ever from any exit out of this clinging dark, any return into the light of the day. The black sightlessness, the close and fetid air, were once more beginning to oppress him heavily. There surged over him a passionate wave of longing for liberty and for the sunlight.

Taking his bearings as best he could, he began creeping toward the point where he judged he had entered the chamber. And, in effect, he did presently find himself in a passageway once more. This he followed for some minutes, noting its gradual rise, a turn here, an angle there, without seeming to feel that he was making any particular progress. Then all at once he remembered the woolen thread.

"That yarn!" he cried, stopping short. "Where is it?"

Hastily he dropped to his knees, and, groping about him, sought to recover the clue. But though he minutely explored the entire floor of the passageway, he found nothing.

For a moment he remained there speechless, silent, in the dark. Then he burst into a harsh laugh.

"This *is* a joke, now, isn't it?" he croaked hoarsely. "That may be an expensive swim I had!"

He got up, and now, aimlessly, began to blunder along. Lacking the thread, he could not even get back to the place where he had first realized he was astray. He might, indeed, have tried to find the death-chamber again, and thence again sought the passage containing the yarn, but this plan did not appeal to him. For

every time he had turned back he had succeeded only in losing himself.

"Now, *now*," he said, "I go forward! Forward—till I find some way out, or—till I die!"

How long he wandered, sightless, in those branching, turning, baffling labyrinths, he could not tell. It seemed like days and weeks, though in all probability it was no longer than a couple of hours.

There is on record a case of a Russian political prisoner, confined in the dark cells for a fortnight, who, when released, claimed to have been there seven months. Without light, the judgment of time becomes impossible.

Thus the doctor, sightless, aimless, knowing neither whence he came nor whither he was going, struggled on and on and on.

His only attempt, now, was always to keep getting higher and higher. If he found a passage going down, as he groped his slow way along it, he turned back and sought another, which might lead him up.

"There must be some exit at the top," he reasoned. "If I labor long enough, always ascending, even though I gain but a few feet an hour, I must eventually reach the apex of this maze, and freedom!"

Well-judged, this bit of logic. For after a weary and disheartening time, when Dennison's courage was almost at an end and he himself more than half ready to sink down exhausted in those interminable, pitch-black ways, his outstretched hand struck against an opposing barrier that closed the passage before him.

IN SPITE of the fact that all this time he had been slowly working upward, Dennison's first thought was that through some singular chance or other he had again come in contact with the door of the chamber where the coffins lay.

But a moment's investigation convinced him that this was not so. For that other door had been of iron, while this, as he passed his eager hands over it, seemed to be of planks studded with rivets.

He threw his weight against it quite uselessly. He perceived at once that the door was bolted on the other side.

"And now," he thought, his heart beginning to throb with wild hopes, "now, if I can only get this open I may be free! It must be that I'm very near the top of the labyrinth. This door probably stands between me and liberty. But how open it?" There was but one answer: Dig through with the pocket-knife!

And having made up his mind to that he set resolutely to work. At about the middle of the door, where certain large bolts indicated the attachment of the bolt beyond, he began excavating. Fortunately the wood, chosen for its resistant power against dampness rather than for strength, cut easily. The rivets bothered him a great deal, however. Though, as he soon discovered by their softness that they were but copper, they seriously impeded his operations. And an hour passed before the point of the knife, hard-driven, penetrated to the other surface of the door.

Dennison, breathless and with aching palms, rested a few minutes, then once again attacked the door. Digging now with renewed energy, he presently made a peep-hole, but though he strained his eyes he could detect no faintest ray of light. There came to him, however, a pungent, familiar, yet elusive odor.

Eagerly he sniffed it, then set to work again. And by dint of tremendous exertion he eventually cut out a section large enough for his hand and wrist to pass.

By turning his hand upward he just managed to reach what he at once perceived to be a heavy metal bolt. But try as he might, till the veins in his forehead swelled and his breath came hard, he could neither force his arm any further nor yet budge the lock.

"Got to cut some more," he judged, disheartened by the prospect of still-continued painful toil. "Before I took that Elixir my arm would have gone clear to the elbow through that. But now—" And with an oath or two he once more began his task.

Now the blade was growing brutally dull. He had to hack and tear the wood rather than cut it. Blisters had begun to form on his hands, and even though he wrapped in his handkerchief the hand that wielded the knife, and changed hands frequently, the pain was growing intense.

But he persisted, gritting his teeth and throwing the whole of his new-found strength into the labor, and at length he found by experiment, that by stripping naked to the waist he could slide his arm in above the elbow.

"Now it's *got* to give!" he exclaimed, savagely, yanking the bolt.

It yielded more easily than he had expected. It slid back with a dull clank. And a moment later the door was swinging open toward him, on noiseless hinges.

For a moment Dennison stood there listening, sniffing with wide nostrils the odor of the place beyond. Then he advanced, forgetting in his eagerness even to dress himself again. But he did not go far.

Because, just beyond the door his hand touched another obstacle. Quickly feeling this over, he perceived that it was the back of a cabinet, or of a piece of furniture of some kind.

He dropped down to his knees. Yes, now he could feel the turned legs of this thing.

"What?" exclaimed he. "What the dickens does *this* mean—a cabinet blocking a rock passage? Ah! I can crawl in under it!"

Snakelike he writhed and wriggled flat along the floor of rock. To his surprise this rock suddenly gave place to some smooth substance—tiling!

Then, a moment later, he was standing in a room which he clearly recognized now by the sense of smell. And in a hushed, awed voice he exclaimed to himself:

"The old man's laboratory, so help me heaven!"

CHAPTER XII

A LETTER AND A CLUE

THE shock of this surprise robbed him, temporarily, of all power to move or speak or even think coherently; but soon he pulled himself together.

"So then," said he, "one branch of this infernal maze connects here, does it? Masked, too, with a bolted door behind a cabinet, eh? Looks nice and honest, doesn't it? Maybe—"

"My ring," said Dennison, "has fallen off; my finger has become too small to hold it"

He stopped short, struck by a horrid thought. To banish it he stretched out his hands and began feeling about him where he was, yet for the first few minutes he could not get his bearings. Everybody knows the sensation of getting "turned around" in the night. The faint trickle of water from the sink should, it seemed to him, be coming from absolutely the other direction. He knew he must move with great care, lest in his confusion he tip something over and raise the alarm.

"If what I suspect is true," he thought, thrilling with a kind of repugnance at thought of Il Vecchio, "it mightn't be the healthiest thing in the world, just now, to be discovered here. The old man might not enjoy my having blundered first into that mortuary, down below, and then into the laboratory. Evidently he's a bit set on keeping it a secret about the entrance from the lab into the caverns. Though—why? Can't tell yet. Anyhow, the way that door is placed, looks so, and—"

Crash!

Dennison stopped short, catching his breath with fear. A bottle against which he had inadvertently struck his hand lay shattered on the tiling. With restrained breath he stood there listening intently a second. But from the study beyond came no sound.

Even though he waited full two minutes, he heard no alarming noise, nothing to indicate that this mishap had been detected.

"Maybe the old man's out with his rose-trees," thought Dennison. "If so, the quicker I make a light and get out of here the better. It would be pleasant under the circumstances, now wouldn't it, to have him just happen in on me, in this particular guestlike situation?"

A light! That was what he needed most. What he must at all hazards find, and quickly. But how?

"Ah! That switch—if I can find it!" he thought.

A moment he stood taking his bearings. Then, creeping in what seemed exactly the wrong direction, guided by the trickle of the sink, he cautiously proceeded toward the spot where he knew the door into the study must be.

In three minutes he had reached it. His hand sought and found the regulator of the vacuum-apparatus.

Click!

Instantly the room glowed with a soft and penetrant light, which, despite its moderation, seemed blinding to the American after his long immersion in total blackness.

At first, he could not stand it, but had to turn it off. Then, after a moment, he set the switch at the lowest contact-point. The dull red, he found, he could endure without any great discomfort. And, now able to see, he found everything had resumed its normal, natural position, just as he had seen it the day before—here the sink, there the little safe-door in the wall, yonder the table over which Il Vecchio had been flung.

Dennison stood gazing about him, blinking, shading his eyes with hollow palm. Strange were his emotions as he gazed upon that place once more, where only a few hours ago—though it seemed a week—the robbery of the Alkahest had taken place. He noted that Il Vecchio had evidently been there since; for now, except for the filtration process in the sink, no activities were going on. An air of desertion, of profound abandonment, lay upon the laboratory. It seemed as though, with that master-treason, the life and interest and energy of the strange room had all gone from it. And Dennison shuddered a little, partly with reminiscence, partly because the underground chamber was cold, and he was now beginning to feel it.

"Well, *this* won't do at all!" he thought. "Some way or other, I've got to keep Il Vecchio from even knowing I've been here. Upon my word if he detects that, if he knows I've come all the way up through those cursed caverns of his, if he even suspects I've seen that Bluebeard-room, down below, my life won't be worth a pin! I've got to cover all my tracks! But how?"

AT FIRST he could see no way. Even had he been able to escape by means of the door into the study, that would betray him. He dared not pound upon the door or wall and cry for help; he dared not stay there. The only possible plan was a retreat via the way he had come, and at first he shrank in terror from this plan.

Yet he saw at once that he must come to it, so, like the man of action he now was, he began making preparations.

First he hastily gathered up every shred and fragment of the broken glass

resulting from the bottle he had knocked off the bench. With a sponge in the sink he washed up the spilled liquid. Then he squeezed the sponge carefully and replaced it. The bits of glass he dropped behind a heavy packing-case in one corner.

Next he set to work to find a light for his guidance back through the labyrinth. At first he could discover nothing that would serve, but presently the idea occurred to him that one of the alcohol lamps might do.

"The only trouble," he reflected, "is that this sort of lamp gives a flame almost without light. What shall I do to improve it? Ah! I know!"

Turning to Il Vecchio's shelves, he searched and found a bottle of sodium. With this he made a saturated solution in the alcohol of one of the little lamps. Lighting it with a match from Il Vecchio's holder on the work-bench, he rejoiced to see that the flame burned yellow. The effect was ghastly, but after all it was a light. "Done!" he said. "And now for the retreat."

He carefully set everything in order, took about twenty matches in case of accident, then stepped to the switch and once more extinguished the vacuum-lights.

Guided now by the eery sodium-flame, he went to the cabinet which concealed the exit.

Here he shoved the lamp underneath, and followed it at once. Through the door he found his clothing, which he hastily put on. He closed the door behind him, and again stood there in the upper corridor of the maze.

The idea occurred to him that he ought to shoot the bolt again, but he instantly dismissed it.

"For," he thought, "if the old chap sees the door at all, by any chance, he'll know well enough what's happened. The wreckage will give me away, bolt or no bolt. My best chance is simply that he won't happen to come this way. Not till I'm some thousands of miles west of the Mediterranean, anyhow!"

He finished dressing himself, and now with the alcohol lamp in hand started back the way he had come.

To his surprise, as he followed the irregularly excavated passage, he noted on the right-hand wall a dull red line, about two inches wide, painted at a distance of three feet from the floor.

Here and there, as he progressed, side-runways led off on either hand, but the red line followed its course.

"I wonder now," said Dennison, with sudden comprehension, "if this doesn't lead straight to the coffin-room? If so—I ought to go back there at once and see what it all means!"

And, fired with a new ambition, he hastened his steps.

The passage, so hard to traverse in the dark, now—even by the feeble, garish rays of the alcohol-flame—seemed plain and easy. Dennison wondered at the fears and mental anguish which but so short a time before had been his. Already he had quite recovered his nerve and poise. He smiled at his previous alarm. The vigor of his body, the splendid, ever-increasing keenness of his mind, set at naught a situation which might have disconcerted the average man. And, eager to probe this mystery, he hastened forward along the rough and winding passageway.

But all at once, to his intense chagrin, he noticed that the lamp was dimming.

"What?" he cried, stopping short and staring at it. Yes, indubitably the yellow flame was dimming. Whether impeded by the strong sodium, whether combatted by some subtle, noxious, subterranean gas he knew not. The fact remained that this, his only hope of escape, was beginning to flicker and sputter unsteadily.

"*That* means," he thought, "that there is no time for any more investigation! I must get out of here before it dies entirely!"

Once more assailed by many fears, he hastened onward.

A side-passage, leading sharply downward, attracted him. His idea had been to reach the top of the maze, but now he desired the bottom, from which he could make a fresh start toward the little door in the cliff. So, taking this way to the left, he hurried on. The tiny flame, as he went, he sedulously guarded behind a curved palm.

Among the walls, which here sparkled with millions of tiny quartz facets and crystalline spicules, the shadow of his hand danced in grotesque, gigantic flights. Before him, dark; behind him, dark. Only for a little space could the feeble glow drive back the pressing hordes of darkness. Clinging to this weak help, his very life dependent on it, he stumbled on.

Suddenly he uttered a sharp cry.

"There! There!" he exclaimed, stopping short.

For all at once he recognized the place. All at once he knew where he was. Down around a curving flight of steps, before him, he saw a dankly dripping wall.

Hastily he descended. A perceptible draft of air struck his sweaty forehead.

"The stairway!" he cried. "The passage from the beach to the door!"

And, petrified with astonishment, still hardly able to realize his situation, he stood gazing a moment. Then, turning into the original stairway, the way he had first come, he began to climb.

The strong current of air harried, and finally blew out the tiny flame. But Dennison, now sure of his way, did not care. He did not even bother to relight it, but kept on, with perfect assurance.

Five minutes later he had reached the door at the stair-head, had crawled out through it onto the tiny ledge in front, and was filling his lungs with the pure crystal air of morning.

Revived, he wondered that the sun was no higher. It seemed to him that the time must be long past noon—even verging toward night. But, no, the sun still hung hardly more than a third of the way up the sky.

He glanced at his watch. It marked only eight-forty-five. "Surely it must have run down," he thought. But, no, it was still ticking busily. "Hang me, if I understand it!" he said. "If I've only been four hours altogether on this expedition, it's the longest four that ever I knew anything about."

An idea struck him.

"Perhaps," he thought, "if I make good time now I can dodge letting Il Vecchio know where I've been, or anything about it."

ACTING immediately on the inspiration, he started up the narrow, broken path. The alcohol-lamp he first thought of hiding in some crevice, against a possible future need, but this idea he at once abandoned.

"If ever I come again—as I surely will—I'll have a better light than that," he assured himself. "A little electric flash now would just about do the business. As for this alcohol affair, I'd better keep it. Maybe I can find a chance later on to slip it back unnoticed into the lab.

He pocketed it, and with renewed vigor continued his perilous climb.

No mishap befell. Before his watch marked nine he stood once more at the cliff-top, down at the rear of the sheltering hedge of sumac at the end of the garden.

Through this he peered cautiously. Nothing alarming presented itself. All was calm, bright, peaceful. Far off, in the olive-grove, he could discern the stocky figure of the Lombard at work spading the roots of a tree. But neither Il Vecchio nor the girl was visible.

So Dennison brushed his clothes as best he might, turned down his trousers over the tops of his shoes, to conceal the fact that he was sockless, set his hat straight, and with an air of slow nonchalance emerged casually from the thicket. Here and there he stopped to pick a blossom or to toss a pebble from the top of the cliff. To all appearances he seemed the most unconcerned of idlers.

Apparently unobserved, he sought the pergola, where for a time he rested, thought, and spied out the lay of the land.

At length, convinced that he could in no possible way be suspected of having invaded the caves beneath the cliff, he sauntered up the gravel-path toward the old house with its leprous, white-plastered walls overrun with clematis and honeysuckle.

As he went he invented a likely tale of exploration over the wall of the estate and across the adjoining properties, toward Cette. But it was not needed. Nobody came to meet him. The Lombard paid him no attention. Stasia, much to his relief—untidy as he was—did not appear. In safety he rounded the corner by the magnolia-beds, reached the broad piazza with its vine-clad pillars, and so presently attained his room.

With an exclamation of relief, he hastily locked the door and began stripping for a good wash-up and a change of clothes.

But hardly had he begun this welcome task when his eye caught a square white envelope upon his dressing-table.

"What?" he wondered. "For me?"

He snatched it up, strangely agitated. Yes, the envelope bore his name, in a fine, cramped, constricted hand.

Hastily he tore it open. A single sheet of paper dropped out. He read:

Please pardon me, my friend, but unavoidable business calls me away for a

few days. When I shall be back I cannot tell, as yet. My house, my library, my study, everything is yours.

Au revoir.

Pagani.

For a moment Dennison studied this brief note with frowning brows and an expression of intense suspicion. Then all at once a thought struck him.

"Those metal tags!" he cried. And hastily he rummaged them from the pocket where they reposed in safety.

He strewed them on the table. He laid the note beside them.

Each bit of metal bore, written with some mordant, a cipher inscription of which he could make nothing. Letters and numbers mingled, with here and there a Greek character and a date.

But though he could not decipher the meaning of these records, as he studied them he shrank back with a sharp cry.

For, beyond any possibility of doubt, the same hand which had traced those cabala of death had also written the cordial message which lay before him there!

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLACK BOOK AND SOME MASONRY

AN HOUR later, Dennison—his mind made up to at least one step, one undertaking—had breakfasted and had gone down into the garden to interview the Lombard.

At the meal he had tried to get some information out of old Marianella, the cook, waitress, and factotum; but she, dim-sighted and hard of hearing, had proved entirely hopeless. She had been unable, even if not unwilling, to give him the slightest satisfaction regarding the absence of Il Vecchio and the girl.

Nor did the Lombard prove more enlightening. All Dennison's questionings, even reenforced by the passage of coin of the realm, elicited nothing. Hard-pressed, the surly fellow merely shrugged his shoulders, spread his palms, and answered:

"How do I know, *m'sieur*? He tells me nothing. They have gone away, that is all. Early this morning they went. Whither? To Arles, perhaps; possibly to Tarascon. Who can say? Luggage? Only a couple of hand-bags, *m'sieur*. Who am I to inquire of the doctor his errands? When will they return? Heaven knows!"

Dennison cursed the fellow mentally, turned on his heel, and strode away. He walked past the house. Over him lay the compelling imperative of action. His newfound strength and life could no longer tolerate a mere passive attitude, a waiting for things to happen. He must be up and doing. Past now and gone were all desire for rest, for idleness; gone the exhaustion of but a day or two ago. He took his way through the orange-grove, pausing only to pick one orange.

"It may come in handy on my way," he thought. "The day's hardly begun yet, and already the heat is coming on."

He glanced about. Nobody was to be seen. From the kitchen piped a thin song as Marianella labored among her casseroles. The Lombard was invisible.

"Good!" exclaimed Dennison, taking the path toward the gate. No one impeded him. He reached it, unseen, found it opened with a spring-lock which permitted anybody inside to go out easily, while preventing ingress from without, and presently—making quite sure he was not followed—struck into the walled road leading down the mountain.

Striding down the steep; singing, slashing with a stick at the roadside flowers, he wondered that so short a time before he could have found the ascent a crucifying task. Away below him lay the city; he could see the azure of the Mediterranean to the right. To the left, the reaches of the canals and of the Etang de Thau. Fifteen minutes later he was in the town.

He walked quickly to the railway station. Tipping liberally, he made inquiries of a porter. Yes, Dr. Pagani and his niece had left Cette that morning on the eight-sixteen. The porter knew them well. Had he not often carried the doctor's luggage, and—?

Dennison had to check the man's verbosity. Where were they bound for? Ah! That would be hard to say. Could the porter find out at the booking-office? Impossible! Convinced at last that he was confronting a real sphinx, he withdrew. No, evidently nothing could be gained that way. He must wait as patiently as possible. All in good time he would know the object and the purpose of this hasty departure.

On the way back, after a late lunch, he stopped at a hardware-shop in the Rue de L'Esplanade and for six-francs-fifty purchased an electric flash-lamp and a stout screw-driver.

"Now," he said as he headed for the mountain once more, "perhaps before long I shall learn a thing or two—something extremely vital to my plans. We'll see."

He returned slowly, thoughtfully, by way of the citadel and the Phare St. Clair. By the time he reached the gate in the wall it was already growing dark. Not wishing to knock, as that would have given the Lombard more information than would have been prudent, he scaled the wall—unmindful of a few cuts from the broken glass set in cement—and dropped soundlessly into the high grass inside.

HE regained the house, rang for the Lombard, and ordered dinner. The fellow, outwardly polite enough, nevertheless regarded him with a disquieting expression. His eye, small and muddy and fringed with piglike lashes, was far from being one to inspire confidence at any time. Now, as it fastened itself on Dennison's face, the American felt a strange uneasiness. He noted, too, that the man's clothing looked dirty and disordered, and that it was flecked here and there with peculiar whitish spots.

But from all this he could infer nothing. Very likely the gardener had been doing some rough outdoor work.

Dennison ate heartily of the excellent mutton and salad, which he followed with a half-liter of Chambertin. Then he went to the study, where the man-of-all-work had already lighted the student-lamp and had started a welcome little blaze in the fireplace. The fragrant cedar, as it burned; the shaded glow of the lamp, the warmth and comfort of this quaint room, with its big chairs and broad leather divan, filled Dennison with well-being. What place, here, for suspicions or unpleasant thoughts?

"Time enough for brooding later," he thought, choosing another of Il Vecchio's manilas. "Time enough for explorations after the old cook and the Lombard are snoring in their attic rooms! Now for an hour or two of solid comfort."

He lighted his cigar over the chimney of the lamp, and, drawing the first rich whiffs, stood there, hands on hips, feet wide apart before the fire, a strong and virile figure, looking with a new interest at the door leading into the laboratory.

"What a room in there!" he mused. "What a story I could make of all this, if anybody in the world would print it or believe it! I wish, now, I could get back into that same place, beyond that combination-lock, for just about an hour. It would be infinitely easier that way, than by going down the cliff in the night and searching for that woolen thread.

"Seems odd to think, now doesn't it, that this very morning I actually stood on the other side of that locked door, groping in the dark for the vacuum-switch, after that infernal peregrination through those caves? Well, no matter; since there's no possible way to work the combination without betraying everything to the old man, I suppose I must do the next best thing and go the way I came. Let's see now, what Pagani has for reading matter, till it's time to start."

Luxuriously smoking with all the old forgotten pleasure he had once found in nicotin, suffused with a glow of strength and sheer animal pleasure from the hearty meal and the generous drafts of wine which sent the new-returning strength vitally pulsing through him, he walked over to the reading-table and began idly pawing over the medical reviews which lay there.

But he found nothing quite to his taste. The book-shelves looked more inviting. Slowly he inspected their contents. Treatises, monographs, scientific works in every language of Europe, crowded each other in profusion. One shelf contained a row of volumes, great and small, all bound in uniform red morocco, with the author's name, Pagani, stamped in gold on the backs.

"So, then, the doctor's written all these, has he?" Dennison queried in surprise and admiration. "Why, I used to think *I* was something of a writer, with my half-dozen brochures on neuropathy; but *this* —hallo! what the deuce, now?"

At the end of the shelf, looking singularly out of place, stood a fat, black volume with a curious label. Even in that rather dim light, reflected from the student-lamp, Dennison made out immediately that the writing on this label was a cipher such as he had found on the metal coffin-tags.

This fact alone whetted his curiosity beyond bounds. Eagerly he snatched the volume from its place and quickly turned to the table with it.

Not stopping even to sit down, he flung it open. "For Heaven's sake!" he exclaimed, turning the pages.

His surprise was well grounded. The book, much worn by years of handling, contained no word of printed matter; but, instead, voluminous records carefully kept and indexed in that peculiar and completely incomprehensible script.

"H-m-m-m! Evidently this will bear looking into still further!" growled the American, a stern and ugly expression coming over his face. "What the deuce and all does it, can it, mean?"

PERPLEXED and uneasy, with a recurrence of that strange, indefinable fear which urged him now and then to flee while there was yet time, he sat down in one of the arm-chairs and planted the book squarely in front of him under the rays of the lamp.

But, though he studied over it the better part of an hour, he could make positively nothing of it. Dates there were, clearly written in French and going back as far as September 11, 1839. Figures in plenty were scattered through the text; and among these Dennison recognized some which he felt certain were anthropometric data of some kind or other. But beyond this, he gained nothing of any moment from his study. Page after page in baffling monotony the writing continued, under widely different dates and with various colors of ink. The script contained many Greek letters; but even though Dennison transliterated these, and tried every language whereof he had even a smattering—some seven or eight in all—he got positively no results.

"Curse the thing!" he cried at last in a sudden rage, and flung it down upon the table.

The back cover flapped open with the impact. There, under the end-paper, he perceived a kind of slit.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, poking with an inquisitive finger. To his surprise he found a pocket in the cover, masked with a flap which, had not the shock of throwing the book uncovered it, would in all probability have escaped his attention.

A moment later he had drawn out a wide, thin envelope.

His hand trembling now with a strangely prescient sense of important discovery about to be made, he opened this envelope.

But when he had spread the contents on the table before him, his face fell with disgust.

And he was about to replace them, when the idea occurred to him that he ought, perhaps, to read a few of them.

This he began to do at once. They were cut from a large variety of papers. Some were in Spanish, others in Italian, English, French, and German. Two even seemed to be in Swedish, though of this the American could not be certain; they might have been Norwegian or Danish, for all that he could tell. There was one cutting from the Hong-Kong *Herald,* one from the *Hellas* of Athens, and a scattering of most peculiar items from places as far apart as Liberia and Hawaii, Moscow and Cape Town, San Francisco and Petropavlosk.

Utterly astounded, Dennison sat there staring at the bizarre collection. He looked them over slowly.

"Yes," he said, "they're arranged according to dates. They run from—let's see—from 1867 to—to—well, this last one, from the *Raivaaja* of Helsingfors, is only a couple of months old. And—*what?* They're all about—what the deuce?—as I live, they're every one disappearances of persons!"

Quickly he ran over the headings, his eyes widening with astonishment and fear.

"Yes, yes!" he added. "Every one! Unaccounted for disappearances! Men—women—children—gone, vanished, never heard of again! What does it mean?"

And, half-starting from his chair, both hands clenched, he stared about him, wild-eyed, as though expecting that some Borgian executioner, ax in hand, stood summoning him at the stairway door that led to the main hall above.

But no, there was nothing. On the mantel the old-fashioned bronze-gilt clock ticked evenly, peacefully. The fire snapped and sputtered, sending its sweet-perfumed warmth through the cheerful room. The student-lamp burned calmly. In the dim regions outside the yellow circle of light it threw upon the clippings and the book, he saw the ranged rows of scholarly treatises, tomes, and pamphlets.

"AM I crazy, or what?" Dennison gasped, shaking and trembling. "What sort of a fool web of suspicion and horror am I weaving? Great Heavens!—am I mad?"

He left the clippings for a while, lighted another cigar with a wisp of paper which he ignited at the grate, and

for some few minutes paced the tiling of the study. Hands clasped behind him, head bowed, he thought.

Then, the puzzled, hunted look still in his eyes, but with a calmer pulse, he came back to the table. He sat down, and for over an hour busily employed himself in making shorthand notes of all the clippings. This done, he carefully stowed his notes away in his pocketbook, along with the metal tags. He replaced the clippings in their proper order, put them into the envelope, and shoved that into the secret pocket at the end of the mysterious record-book.

This he put back onto the shelf, just as he had found it. He felt certain, now, that he had left no indication anywhere of his indiscreet investigation.

Ten strokes from the clock recalled him to the fact that the hour was growing late.

"Now," he said, "now that I *seem* to have established the fact that Il Vecchio has for a number of years been taking the most vital interest in unaccounted-for disappearances of human beings of all ages and races, I think perhaps the flash-lamp and the screw-driver and I might possibly find something of interest down below!"

He poked the fire down for the night, extinguished the lamp, and went up to his room.

A few minutes later, equipped with his tools, and leaving his room in darkness so that the Lombard, if indeed he were not long ago sleeping, should think the guest in bed, he noiselessly climbed down the trellis just as he had done the night before.

Cautiously, soundlessly as a wraith, he reached the pergola on its jutting outcrop of volcanic stone. The aloes, palms, and mulberry-trees seemed to offer complete protection from any spying eyes. He thanked his tutelary gods there was no moon. Save for the big-eyed wonder of those half-tropic stars above the sea, the night was black.

He paused a moment to watch the far lighthouse on Les Stes. Maries, to listen to the soughing wash and rumble of the surf a full fifth of a mile below.

Then, awed with the majesty of the night, yet thrilled with so keen a passion of discovery as banished any wish to dwell upon it, he took the little path leading to the clump of sumacs.

Half an hour's hard and perilous toil by the flickering light of the little electric flash, half an hour's risks and perils along that narrow, broken runway down the face of the cliff, brought him, sweating and panting for breath, to the culde-sac where he had found the little door.

Dark though the place was, doubly dark behind its masking screen of bushes, he recognized it.

"Now for the stairs!" he gulped, his heart beginning to leap with long-pent eagerness.

He threw the electric beam against the place where he expected to enter.

Then, staring as though he had seen a ghost, he stood there speechless, shivering, sick with the shock of his unspeakable astonishment.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "The door! It's been walled up!"

CHAPTER XIV

LIFE, LOVE—AND FEAR

FOR a long minute he stood there, peering, unable to believe the evident testimony of his senses. In his supreme astonishment, his bitter disappointment at being thus baffled on the very first step of his investigation, he felt there must be some mistake, some self-deception, in this thing.

But soon the touch of stone and mortar, fresh-laid yet already solidified into an impregnable mass, dispelled any such idea.

As he swept this incomprehensible barrier with his shaft of white light, he began to take cognizance of how the thing must have been done.

"This looks," he said to himself, "as though it had been laid up from the inside. The absence of trowel-marks on the mortar, the way the mortar has oozed out and fallen here and here, proves that clearly enough. Yes, so it must have been. There's no room here for a man to stand and work. It would have been impossible to transport this amount of stone down the face of the cliff. Of a certainty the mason stood inside, at the top of the stairway. The mason? The Lombard, of course! Ah! Now I understand!"

There recurred to him the memory of the man's dirty and disordered clothing and of the peculiar spots upon it.

"He—he did it!" the American exclaimed bitterly. "And if so—what then?

By whose order? How did he get into the labyrinth? Has he access to the laboratory? Does he know the combination of the door from the study into it? Il Vecchio expressly told me that nobody knew it but himself! Then—is there some other way into that maze? Great Heavens, what a mass of riddles, complications and cross-purposes! What webs of mystery! And I—I seem caught at the center of them all!"

He did not stay long, on the ledge above the sea, in face of that impassable barrier which for the time being cut off all his hopes of solving the great secret of the death-chamber. Dejected, angry, and not without a self-unconfessed qualm of fear as to the outcome of all this, he presently turned and began again the long, perilous climb to the cliff-top.

It was with a sense of infinite relief that he eventually regained his room by clambering up the trellis. Then he shut the blinds. Even in spite of all his new, magnificent strength, the labors and excitements of the past two days and nights were beginning to tell on him. Some forty hours had passed since he had slept. Nature was beginning to make strong demands upon him for rest. And, like a sensible man—since for the present he could follow no further the clue of his investigation—he yielded to that injunction.

Not venturing to strike a light, he undressed in the dark and turned in. Soon all his speculations, all the hundred and one questings of his perplexed mind, resolved themselves into a delicious warmth and drowsiness. He slept.

Mid-morning of the next day was more than past when he awoke, refreshed, invigorated, splendidly strong and full of life.

Dispelled were all the fears and haunting visions of the night. Entirely healed, without scars, the cuts on his hands, made the night before by the pieces of broken glass on top of the wall. As he sprang out of bed and stretched luxuriously, reveling in his new-found suppleness and force, a great primal gladness surged through his heart.

"Life! Life!" he cried again. "Thank God for that, whatever may happen!"

The big mirror set into the door of his clothes-press caught his eye. He strode over to it, and for a while stood there examining his features.

"How can this be?" he exclaimed. "And yet, it *is!* If anybody had tried to tell me, a week ago, that such a thing could happen, I'd merely have recommended him to see an alienist. Yet—look! See! The impossible has happened. The unbelievable is an accomplished fact!"

Wondering, he studied his face, where notable changes had taken place.

Already the deeper wrinkles about the eyes and mouth, and across the forehead, had begun to lessen. The smaller ones had practically all disappeared. The yellowish cast of age no longer lay in the eyes, that muddy and unhealthy look which Dennison so well recalled. No, the whites were now clear and true, the pupils sparkling, the expression strong and vigorous.

The cheeks, he noted with pleasure and astonishment, were no longer hollow and deep-lined with care, suffering and malnutrition. Full and smooth, they showed the healthy blood coursing in full tide beneath the skin. From grizzled white his hair was already beginning to reassume the brown of middle life. Upon the heretofore bald expanse of his cranium a vigorous new growth was pushing forth. Quite similarly, his eyebrows had grown darker and more glossy. The mustache, too, had begun to win back its earlier hue and to lose something of its stiff and wiry character.

Even the nose, which but so short a time before had shown the aquiline curve indicative of approaching senility, had modified its form and now seemed returning to the straight perfection of earlier days. The jaw had once more grown strong and firm, the lips full and red, the whole face indicative not only of the strength and vitality of a man hardly past his prime, but even of a greater force.

YET, astounding as all these metamorphoses were, a still more overwhelming surprise awaited him. For, baring his teeth, he was amazed to perceive that they had whitened and apparently strengthened; and, most marvellous of all—so singular that were it not a fact, on record, I could not ask for credence—that in his right upper canine a gold filling had been slightly displaced.

"What?" Dennison cried, staring with incredulity. He studied this phenomenon carefully.

Yes, no possible doubt of it could exist; the filling was being pushed out of place

by a new growth or deposit of enamel and dentine underneath!

Hastily he looked at his other fillings. Without exception they all manifested the same tendency.

Too greatly overwhelmed by astonishment for any words, he stood there staring, gaping open-mouthed in wonder for a minute.

His every concept, all his scientific training, his ideas of cause and effect, evolution, development, and progressive decay, the irrevocable nature of catabolism—all, everything, was kept swept into the mental junk-heap. Tremendous readjustments, mental as well as physical, were thrusting themselves upon him. And, in a kind of stupor, he exclaimed:

"Why—why, then—it's only a matter of time when I'll have the sound, perfect teeth of my young manhood again! When in *every* way I shall not only stop decay, but reach absolute physical perfection! When I, I myself, only the other day a wreck and doomed to die, shall be Hermes, Balder, Apollo, Ormuzd—youth eternal—life everlasting and imperishable!"

Dazed, half-stunned, he dressed and went out for a walk in the grounds.

"No, no," his only conclusion was, "I cannot understand it. It passes human reason. Yet—*it is!*"

And to his eyes, strangers to weeping for many a long, decadent year, rose a resistless gush of tears—tears of a joy so deep, a happiness so unspeakably profound, that in no other way could it find outlet or expression.

FOR the next three days Dennison lived a strange life there in the walled estate on Mount St. Clair and in the environs; a life blended of poignant new sensations, keen curiosity, intense scientific speculation and observation of his somatic changes, acute loneliness and longing for Stasia, ennui mingled with an undercurrent of inexhaustible excitement, long thoughts, strange plans and hopes and fears.

Pleased at first with the absence of Il Vecchio, he soon came to miss him terribly. For the Italian, whatever his ultimate purpose as regarded his treacherous guest, would at least have furnished the companionship that Dennison at this most critical period in his whole life so urgently demanded. The American felt a wild desire to talk of his condition, to discuss it, analyze it with some other mind, record it and attempt to set its bounds.

But, with only the dogged Lombard and Marianella at hand, both of whom he felt to be covertly hostile, no possible opportunity existed for any such discussion. So Dennison had to possess his soul in patience, read, walk, think, and in tense awe and wonder watch his years slip off him, one by one, observe middle age come back, see signs of youth return, live, all alone, through a crisis such as never since the world evolved from primitive fire-mist had come to any living creature.

Though mentally hungry, starved for conpanionship and understanding, yet his bodily wants were well served by the two domestics. Lombard and the cook spread for him a plentiful table either in the dining-room, or, if he so desired, outdoors on the terrace overlooking the sea. Dennison never spoke a word to either of them concerning the caves beneath. He asked no slightest question.

Toward these two people he maintained a close reserve, punctuated with an occasional five-franc piece. Though Marianella seemed a simple soul, he felt the eye of Lombard always on him. And, sensing rather than seeing the expression of this man as perhaps he came and went behind the guest's chair, to serve him, Dennison felt a strong, instinctive uneasiness, a conviction that certain matters were shaping which spelled no good for him.

One incident occurred which set him very ill at ease. On the morning of the second day he had gone down to the study with the intention of trying once more to puzzle out the cipher in the black book. He had this volume open before him, and was busily copying out a page of the record, meaning to preserve it for future reference, when all at once he heard a step behind him.

Turning, he perceived the Lombard.

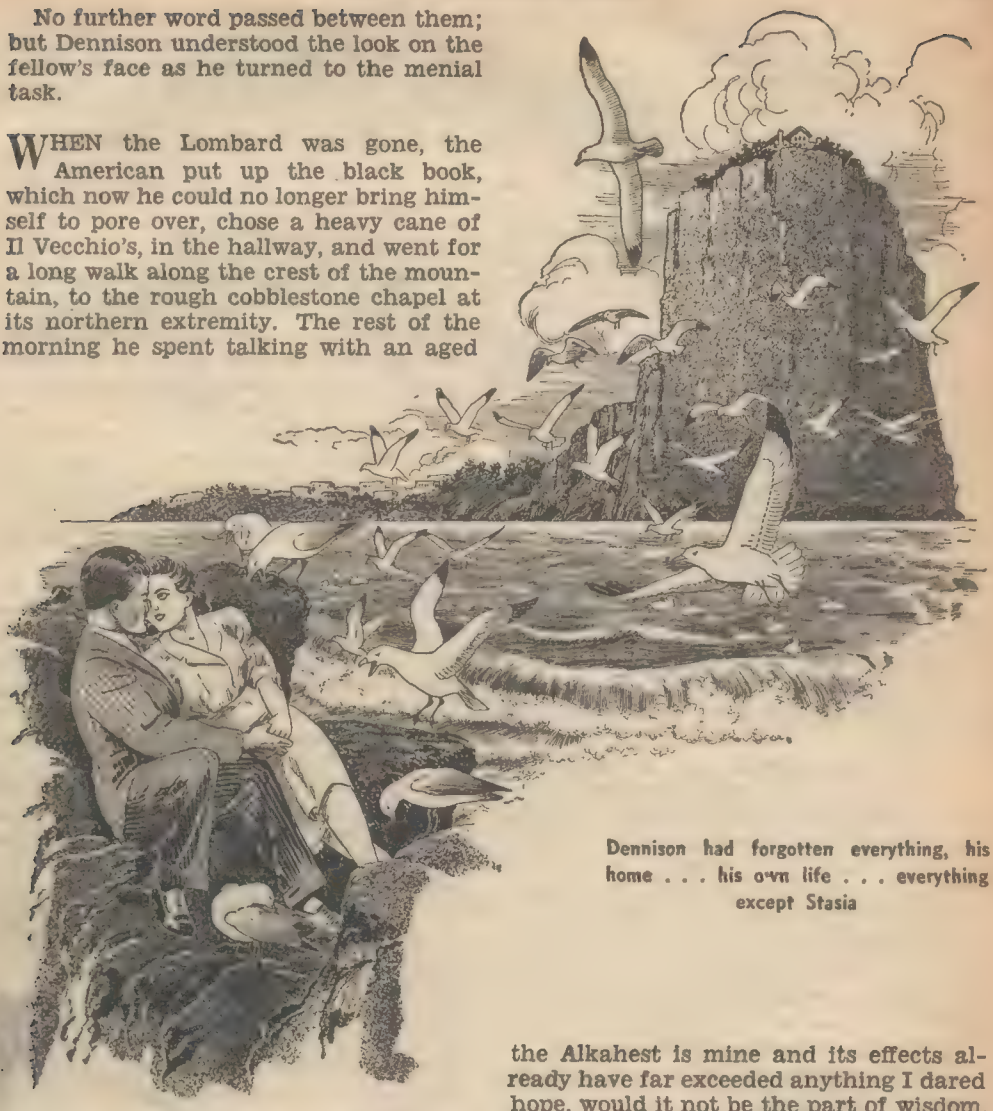
"Well?" cried he angrily. "What is it? What do you want?"

"Nothing, *m'sieur*," replied the man, saluting. "I only came because you rang for me." And he nodded at the push-button in the wall close to the bookcase.

"I? I rang for you?" exclaimed the American. "No, you're mistaken! I need nothing—only to—" Then he recovered his control. "Yes, now you're here, you might—er—clean out the fireplace."

No further word passed between them; but Dennison understood the look on the fellow's face as he turned to the menial task.

WHEN the Lombard was gone, the American put up the black book, which now he could no longer bring himself to pore over, chose a heavy cane of Il Vecchio's, in the hallway, and went for a long walk along the crest of the mountain, to the rough cobblestone chapel at its northern extremity. The rest of the morning he spent talking with an aged peasant whom he met close beside that very curious building, dressing a few vines in a terraced plot of ground. This somewhat relieved his mind. Anything, it seemed, was better than brooding introspection all alone.



Dennison had forgotten everything, his home . . . his own life . . . everything except Stasia

"Ought I not to seize this opportunity to make good my escape from here?" he seriously asked himself, as the next afternoon he sat smoking one of his host's cigars and watching, from the summerhouse, the feluccas of the Cette fishing-fleet tacking homeward under the declining sun.

"Now that I have attained the object of my long, painful pilgrimage; now that the Alkahest is mine and its effects already have far exceeded anything I dared hope, would it not be the part of wisdom, this very night, secretly to take my things, make off down the mountain, and catch the midnight express to Bordeaux?

"Why should I remain here, surrounded by mystery, espionage, and probable hate, subjected to great possible dangers in the future, when Il Vecchio returns? Why should I run these deadly risks? Why?"

Yet, though he turned these questions every way in his mind, he could frame no satisfactory answer. In the first place, a compelling desire had taken fire in his soul to solve the mystery of the black book, of the caves, the mortuary chamber, and all connected with them. Until time and opportunity should solve that

monstrous riddle, he felt he could not possibly desert the place.

Then again, thoughts of Stasia acted like a powerful magnet to hold him from departure. Now that through his veins a new, strong life was pulsing, now that the passing of every hour brought him greater vigor, a finer strength, and a renewal of his youth, now that he felt again a return of all those long-forgotten impulses and thoughts which his prime had known, he understood the bonds which had grown up about his heart.

Stasia was very beautiful. Young she was, and dowered with that charm which invests the European woman in her first, delicious bloom. And Dennison's mind reverted to her as naturally, as inevitably as water flows down hill. Though, had he asked himself the question point-blank, he would have scouted the idea that he was already in love, yet he felt that at all hazards he must remain a while, till she returned; that he must see her again, talk with her, look upon her, be with her for a few elysian days in that terrestrial paradise.

Thus, half-unconsciously, he mused; and, musing, fed the flame within his breast.

Even more potent than all this, far off at the back of his mind, half-unrealized, yet compelling, dwelt another thought, an insinuating fear which even to himself he dared not voice—a fear which impelled him to remain near Il Vecchio, a fear which vaguely hinted that perhaps in the elixir might lie other, still unknown forces. Forces which, once set at work as they might already have been, it would require all the knowledge and the power of the aged scientist to overcome.

All things considered, Dennison found he could not flee.

"No," he summed up everything, "No, I must stay a while. A week or two, at any rate. Time enough then to make good my escape. But for the present, quite impossible!"

His decision taken, he pitched the smoked-out cigar over the cliff. For a few minutes he sat there thinking deeply, gazing out upon that Homeric sea, over the broad, blue floor which, seeming to slant upward till its horizon lay at the level of his eye, was dotted here and there by a sail—brown or dull red or vermilion, triangular and bellying with the urge of the southern breeze.

"Perfect! Divine!" he mused, as the warm, thyme-scented breeze fanned his face. "A heaven on earth, an Eden, if there ever was one. And I, the Adam just created here, must stay a while to revel in it! Ah, if my Eve were only here!"

CHAPTER XV

THE RING

THE NEXT day was a day of *dolce far niente* and of Spanish castle-building, with Stasia as the inspiration of each dream. To the first flush of activity, a delightful restfulness had succeeded, as though the perfect interplay of every function, the harmony of his regenerated body now demanded rest in place of action. All day long Dennison read and smoked and idled, supremely blissful. Once or twice he went up to his room to examine his face in the tall mirror. And, slight though the changes were, he still felt positive he could detect a little rejuvenescence that progressed and, by its action, thrilled him with new delight.

Yet, somehow, as late afternoon drew down toward evening, and the wide expanse of sea and sky began to burn in a golden haze, a vague uneasiness, insinuating, evasive, began to fill his mind.

He moved about, sought now the shelter of a gnarled olive, now the exposure of the bald cliff-top, wandered through the poppy and tulip beds, even tried to talk with the Lombard; but nothing helped.

"What's the matter with me, I wonder?" he now exclaimed at last, with petulance. "Haven't I everything I need? Everything—save *her*—that human heart could wish? My friends, back home, are fighting through fog and snow and storm. Here am I, lapped in eternal summer, in never-fading beauty! And yet—"

He shrugged his shoulders, turned, and went into the house. Lonesome all through, he was glad when the Lombard announced that *m'sieur* was served, that dinner was prepared. As long as he could he extended the meal. It kept him, for a while at least, from ennui; the ennui which, so he assured himself, must be all that was disturbing his peace of mind.

After dinner he looked again at his face, in the mirror. This time, whether because of the dim light, or his somewhat disturbed state of mind, or however it may have been, the sight still further upset him.

"I'm—I'm looking a bit *too* young," he exclaimed nervously, trying in vain to smile. "My skin certainly does seem smooth. And my mustache, why it's positively quite silky again—almost like—h-m—like it used to be, Lord knows how long ago! I—I hope this thing isn't a continuous performance, as it were. Because, in that case, it—it might be a trifle embarrassing, might it not?"

Anxiously he studied his features. It seemed to him certain that a disquieting change had set in, as though vigorous maturity had been succeeded—or was beginning to be—by a less virile, less masculine look.

Something seemed to have left his face; something which he did not wish to lose. Already a sort of adolescent freshness was creeping in.

But, as he brought a lamp and closely scrutinized every line and feature, he could not clearly trace or analyze this thing; and now, with better light, he could not be quite positive he even saw it.

With a laugh at his own foolish fears, he betook himself to the study once more, there to pass the lonesome evening as best he might, before II Vecchio's cigars and books.

At first, having reached this room, he thought of renewing his study of the black book; but soon dismissed this from his mind.

"I can learn nothing from it, anyhow," he thought, possessed by a certain languor, a lazy sense of wishing to be amused rather than to think and ponder. "Sometime I will fathom it; not now. Ah! Here's something! De Maupassant, as I live!"

Gladly he pulled from the shelf a volume of short stories in French, by Maupassant. And, two minutes later, he was settled comfortably for a long evening's pleasure.

The first story in the book was "Le Horla," which he had never read. The weird, fanciful, terrifying descriptions of a mind fast approaching insanity—Maupassant's own mind, reflected in the novel—fascinated him. Seated in a long, low wicker-chair, with the student-lamp at his left hand, he passed two hours and a half in deep absorption.

Temporarily, not even the idea of Stasia had been able to force itself between him and this tale of ghostly doom. Through the wide-open window the night breeze ebbed and flowed, swaying the smoke of his cigar into fantastic forms almost like those of the vicious Brazilian ghoul whereof the French text told him.

Far away, far below, a low, rolling thunder, rising, falling, yet never still, spoke of the hungry surf under the cliff. A nightingale was singing somewhere in the groves; its melting raptures of melody fell on deaf ears as Dennison, fascinated by this other man's experiences of strangling fear, read on and on and on, eagerly turning the pages toward the inevitable catastrophe at the end.

Dennison's book lay on a reading-stand, which he had adjusted so that he might lean back easily in the long chair and get a perfect light on the page. His right hand held the cigar. His left hung carelessly over the arm of the chair, almost touching the floor, which, like all the flooring in that old-fashioned house, was of red octagonal tiling.

ALL at once, as he stopped for a moment to rest from the strain of the horrible narrative and to ponder the dread consequences of the Horla's parasitism, a little *clink* attracted his attention.

Something small and hard rolled on the floor, spiralled, and came to rest—a thin little wavering band of gold, it seemed.

"What's *that?*" Dennison cried.

He sat up, suddenly, for some strange reason instinctively seized with a new and strange alarm. His heart began to pound unnaturally. Eagerly he strained his ears, listening whether or not that sound would come again.

No, nothing.

"What the deuce?" he exclaimed with some heat, as though to banish the impending evil which he realized subjectively was about to smite him.

A long minute he waited, peering round with wide eyes. His nerves were suddenly drawn taut.

He brought up his left hand—up, up, into the range of vision. He flung it out before his eyes.

"Ah-h-h!" he gasped. "My ring—it's fallen off!"

His face went gray. He understood. It typified the end.

"My ring—too big now for my finger!"

He flung over the reading-stand, book and all. Down on both knees he fell, and

there on the tiles began scrabbling round for the little circlet.

He found it presently. Quickly he put it on again. He turned it round and round, massaged the flesh of his finger, held his hand out before him, tried the ring again, and in every possible way sought to convince himself his hand had *not* decreased in size since the previous day.

But no! He could not compass it. He knew at last the truth, proved to him now by the unimpeachable evidence of cold metal. He knew! He understood! He had already passed the meridian of life; now he was shrinking back toward youth again!

"Merciful Heaven!" he choked, bowed with horror and with a sick revulsion of all his hopes, his dreams. "Where will all this end? *Where—*"

"Ah! That, my friend, is now the vital, the truly crucial point at issue!" sounded a deep, resonant voice. "If we knew *that*, we should hold the key to all!"

Despite his anguish, his distress, the American looked up with startled, haggard eyes.

There in the doorway, tall and stern and ominous in the shadow, stood Il Vecchio.

Dennison started back as though he had seen a specter; as though the Horla itself had risen up before him.

"*You?*" he croaked hoarsely. "You—here?"

"Why not?" replied the Italian, a cynical smile upon his bearded lips. "Too long already have I deprived myself of the pleasure of your society. And now—but what is this? Why do you cringe? Why are you pale and shaken, my guest, my friend?"

Seized by a sudden, invincible loathing for this man whom he suspected of so much, against whom he could really prove so little, Dennison recoiled still further.

Then, racked with terror, impelled by a mad, burning lust to know the truth, once and for all, about this thing, he staggered to his feet.

He reeled toward Il Vecchio, hands outflung and shaking as with palsy.

"Tell me! Tell me!" he wailed. "What will the end of all this be? The end! The end!"

"How can I?" smiled Il Vecchio grimly. "Tell me!"

"Tell you the end? When this, my dear young guest, *is hardly the beginning!*"

"You mean—" gasped Dennison; then, brain and body yielding alike to the horror of the thought, he staggered and fell fainting on the floor.

Il Vecchio, a strange, exultant gleam in his sunken eyes, folded his arms and gazed down at the prostrate figure there before him.

"The end?" said he. "Ah! if he only knew!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE PROMISE

THE waving of a curtain in the breeze, slow, gentle, soothing, formed the first definite impression that brought Dennison back to consciousness again. Rousing, he peered out through that curtain, out into the dark green eucalyptus hedge and the pale aloes that bounded the path opposite his window. Then he realized that it was morning; that he was lying in his own bed; that many hours must have flown, leaving no trace in consciousness, since the horror and distress of the past night.

And now, entirely refreshed again, now once more all life and energy, he sat up quickly in bed. He rubbed his eyes to dispel the last clinging traces of sleep. Deeply he inhaled the fresh, crisp morning air that idled in at the window; and through him the tides of strength returned.

"Why—I must have dreamed it all!" his first thought was. But, looking out again, he clearly saw the long, white frock of Il Vecchio half-hidden among the olives.

"No," he added, hardly understanding as yet. "No, that can't be. The doctor's home again. But—well, I guess I must have fainted. They carried me off to bed, that's evident. Probably the old man gave me some potassium bromid, or something of that sort. I'm certainly here, at any rate; and I've had one grand sleep! No matter—everything's all right!"

Vague as half-forgotten nightmares now seemed to him the terrors of the night before, down in the doctor's study. Already obliterated was the anguish of his discovery. And even though he raised his hand and looked at it, found the ring still missing and knew it had in all reality fallen off, he only smiled.

"Pshaw!" he sneered, ashamed of his last night's weakness in presence of the patriarch. "What of that? There's noth-

ing to be alarmed about, is there? I must have been overcome by the gruesome fascination of the infernal Maupassant yarn. What if I am a trifle reduced in bulk? So much the better! So much nearer the perfect standard. It's a gain, instead of a loss! What else could have been expected? Nothing's more natural, after all, than that a human body, returning from senility to the prime of life, should grow more solid, more compact!

"It's—it must be—only the bagginess of age that's left me; a sort of taking-in of the slack, so to express it. Reasonable, natural, eminently right and proper. What a fool I was to have raised such an outcry, to have kicked up such a row about so simple a detail!"

Vastly reassured, he clambered out of bed, stretched, breathed deeply, and felt with an immense joy the perfect response of his revivified muscles, the lithe play of his strongly graceful body.

Quickly he washed and dressed. There lay upon him the imperative demand for breakfast, for tobacco, for exertion—for life! All his black and ugly thoughts, whether of personal fear, or of suspicion relative to the caves, dislike of the Lombard, hatred of Il Vecchio—all these, all, everyone, were for the moment swept away in the bright, glad outburst of his new-born life that sang within him, greeting another radiant day.

The pendulum of anxiety, of introspection, and spying doubt had swung far back. Now the reaction was carrying him into enthusiastic pleasure in the mere animal enjoyment of his strength, in the marvelous glow and warmth of that new day upon the enchanted coast.

"I'll take a hand at gardening myself, today," he thought, humming an old love-tune. "It's been twenty years since I've dug the good black earth. Why, the smell of it beats any perfume in this world!"

Eagerly he scented the breeze, as he stood there at the window overlooking that sun-bathed quietude of the walled estate. New instincts were awakening, old long-forgotten ones reviving in his breast. "Give me a mattock or a spading-fork," he said, "and I'll soon make the dirt fly!"

SOME minutes later, Il Vecchio greeted him in the olive-grove with a smile and an outstretched hand which Dennison pressed warmly.

"Well, and how are we this morning?" asked the old man very kindly. "The little nervous upset of last night, I see, has quite gone by. Your eye is clear and firm, color excellent, hand steady as a rock. Health, in short, absolutely perfect, is it not? Ah, my friend, if only more men would do as you are doing—quit their cares and worries for a while, and seek retirement from the world! Seek nature, in her never-failing youth and joy! Like Antaeus, the fabled giant of old, who rose nine times stronger every time he was thrown to earth by Hercules, so can men, even to-day, find life and strength thus, as *I* find them!"

Smiling, he nodded at his long-handled spade, to which the dark, rich Mediterranean soil clung thickly. Neither in look nor tone lay any slightest reminiscent hint of the wrong that Dennison had done him, nor yet of any ulterior thought whatsoever. And, as though washed away by some subtle, quiet power, impossible to understand or to resist, the apprehensions and distrusts of Dennison—already greatly weakened—seemed to disappear.

It was less that any problem had been solved than that all questionings for the time merely had faded into other, brighter, happier thoughts. And Dennison, looking at the old man—apparently so simple, so unaffected—as he stood there in the checkered, moving shadows, leaning upon his spade, smiled back with joy.

He filled and lighted the pipe which he had bought in the village, took a long inhalation, and, with a laugh, exclaimed:

"Come! Give me some tools! The call of mother earth is on me, strong, this morning. I haven't heard it since Heaven knows when; but I hear it *now*. And I obey! To work!"

THAT was a day of days for the American; a morning such as few men ever know. Air, sun, sky—a turquoise bowl inverted on the green—bird-songs and breeze all blended to a symphonic wonder of sound, light, color, and emotion; and, like a counter-bass to everything, now rose, now fell the far, low, booming threnody of surf.

Together, speaking or in silence, the two men gladly labored, with the Lombard doing the bidding of Il Vecchio for all the coarser toil. And as Dennison delved, smoked, felt once more the thrilling touch of earth—our all-mother—or,

resting a moment, stood up, dashed the sweat from his glowing forehead and looked abroad across that summer sea, white-flecked with felucca-sails, his heart was so glad within him that it almost burst for joy. Song rose to his lips; and through his soul welled the flood-tides of perfect happiness.

Perfect? Not quite. Though no exhaustion followed his toil, though it was god-like bliss to feel the strong, resilient muscles obey his will, to sense "the married harmony of form and function," yet the thought of Stasia still obtruded. He wanted her! He needed her!

The sight of her sweet, wistful face, the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, had become almost obsessions to him, in their intense evocation of desire. And, as the memory of her rose before his mind, he thrilled with unspoken hopes, with passion he himself dared not admit or give free rein to.

A score of times he found his tongue shaping her name, his lips about to speak, to question Il Vecchio. Where was she? He burned to ask. Why had she thus been taken from him? How long must she remain away? Yet, though everything impelled him to these queries, he restrained himself. For nothing, he knew, could be gained by exciting the old man's already evident uneasiness in this respect.

That Il Vecchio had taken her away for the very purpose of avoiding any possible romance between her and the American, Dennison did not for a moment fail to suspect. Well he knew the European idea, the old dowry system, the marriages often arranged by proxy years before they can be consummated.

"In all probability," he thought, setting his jaw a little grimly, "she's already betrothed to some petty *bourgeois* down in Cette, or in some one of these provincial towns. What thoughts are these of mine? Why should I, a foreigner, a stranger, a chance arrival, entertain such mad ideas?"

Yet he could not put them away. Again and again he found himself dwelling on this one train of reasoning. And not all the old man's talk of olive-growth, and viticulture, phylloxera, and parasites, not all his own labor with the hoe and pruning-knife, not all his stern self-prohibition, could for long hold nature's thoughts from surging back again.

"Bah! What folly is this?" he angrily demanded of himself, at last, when—all the trees of the southernmost tier having been spaded round—Il Vecchio ordered the Lombard to bring a huge, brimming jug of milk, with figs, cheese-cakes, and honey. "What madness? What am I thinking of? Why should I entertain such chimeras? Am I insane, to think such thoughts?"

He sat down in the shade, at ease, and looked with a strange frown at the sunlit *parterres*, the lawns, and groves of this delightful place.

"Is not all this," he wondered, "merely the physical reaction of the great change which has taken place and still is taking place in me? Surely, my thoughts are not of Stasia, but of womankind in general! Had any other woman been at hand, would it not have been the same?"

Through his mind passed a memory of "Midsummer Night's Dream," and of Lysander's waking after Puck had annointed his eyes with the magic blossom; of Lysander's love for Helen; of all the strangely whimsical complications following that sport of the fairy-people. Well-used to psychic analyses, he seemed to see a parallel in his own case. Silently he ate, while the old man watched him with a shrewd, yet unobtrusive eye.

"What?" thought the American. "Am I so foolish as to consider marrying a little French girl of hardly twenty years, who's never even been to Paris and who knows practically nothing of the world? Whose principal diversions seem to be her music and her fancy-work, with a little landscape painting now and then? Come, come! This cannot, must not be!"

Il Vecchio, pouring him another glass of foaming milk interrupted his reflections.

"Let us drink deep of this," remarked the old man. "Next to my lost Alkahest, it is the veritable elixir."

Il Vecchio's words hardly penetrated Dennison's consciousness. The patriarch gazed at him with a dry, calculating look, which the other man failed to note.

BETWEEN the American's eyes a wrinkle of perplexity creased his brow. Still was his mind running in the forbidden channel; still was he trying to convince himself that the obvious was impossible.

"No, no!" he thought sternly. "No follies, now! No indiscretions! Here am I, Granville Dennison, surgeon and man of means—an American, experienced,

shrewd—dreaming preposterous dreams! It's the elixir in my blood, the air, the sun, the warmth, the eternal springtime, here. I must pull together! Come, this won't do at all. To work, to work!"

He beckoned the Lombard and handed him his glass, then started to seize a spade. But Il Vecchio detained him with a smile.

"Do not hurry, my friend," he admonished him. "Here we have time enough, time for all things."

Dennison eyed him thoughtfully, as, resting there beneath the trees, the old man appeared to meditate with benign retrospection. And, looking at him, he shivered slightly. The Lombard, at a glance from his master, withdrew.

Something, the American knew not what, seemed to have passed between them; something hostile, something ominous and dread. As on a summer afternoon you have perhaps seen a cloud-shadow steal down a sunlit valley, while yet the cloud itself had not yet reached the sun that shines on you, so Dennison felt the chill of some subtle premonition.

A haunting reminiscence of suspicion and of fear flitted through his mind, blighting the happiness of that past, perfect hour. A memory of the caverns, rising unbidden, numbed his heart. Instinctively he moved a trifle farther from Il Vecchio. A vision of imperative flight, of escape while time still remained, crossed his apperception. Yet he concealed his thought.

"For all things? There is time for all?" he asked, in level tones.

"All!" answered the patriarch, unmoved.

"Except love!" cried Dennison. The words, in spite of him, burst unbidden from his very soul. And, following them, came a jangling and discordant laugh.

"No; that, too, you shall have," said Il Vecchio, nodding very gravely. "Did I not tell you last night that everything thus far accomplished was but the beginning, the overture of your life-symphony? You perhaps misinterpreted me. But I repeat it, this is only the beginning!"

"What?" cried Dennison, starting up. "You—you mean—"

"As the gods loved on cloud-capped Olympus, so shall you! As the Aztec golden youth loved on his high, sacred teocallis, you, too, shall love! Thus I repay—"

"*I*—?"

"As mortal man has never loved before, you shall know love! Never since time was, has a romance shaped like this; never has one so perfect or so passionate been even dreamed! In you the epic of youth and joy shall blend to an unspeakable perfection. Lacking this, my life-experiment, all but destroyed by you, were lost, my ineffable harmony made discord! Ah, you shall see. You will not leave me; you will not, now! Behold, the heavens open out before you!

"But come, come, my friend; enough of words. There is still work to do among my olives. Come, let us get to the task before us, before the noon-day heat comes on!"

Smiling again, he rose and grasped his long-handled spade.

But Dennison, suddenly going very pale, stared at him a long moment with tremulous lips and wide, passionate eyes; then, turning, strode unsteadily away.

Il Vecchio watched him craftily, a moment. He nodded, stroked his beard, and muttered something to himself. Then, with a thin and quiet smile he once more turned to his task among the olive-trees.

CHAPTER XVII

STASIA'S RETURN

A WEEK passed, then a fortnight; and, except for his growing fever of impatience to see the girl once more, Dennison noted no disquieting symptoms. Perfect in bodily health and vigor, he seemed to remain static. No further changes occurred. The only abnormality in him—one which he hardly perceived—was a sort of mental inhibition, a lack of spontaneity, of initiative.

No longer had he the will to struggle, to resist or to combat the power of Il Vecchio over him, even had he been so minded. No longer did his thoughts revert to the cave-mystery; no longer had he any impulse or desire to study out that cipher book, to ponder the questions at issue or to prosecute the investigations so eagerly begun.

Lulled in a drowsy well-being, lapped in physical perfection, surrounded by every comfort, every beauty, he fell gradually into a beatified half-somnolescence, a land-o'-dreams condition, a lotus-eater's bliss, such as Tennyson tells of in the county "where it was always after-

noon." And so, drifting, happy beyond the rightful happiness of man, glorious in perfect bodily grace, beautiful as Narcissus, he felt the magic of the Alkahest mold him to symmetry in every part.

Once only, during that enchanted fortnight, did strange, uneasy thoughts cross his mind. It was on the evening of the twelfth day since Il Vecchio had promised him the love of Stasia. Idly he had been looking over a pile of medical and popular reviews, down in the pergola.

His attention half-divided between these and the majestic suspiration of the sea, the dreaming beauty of the landscape, he had been listlessly turning the pages. About his head were curling odorous tobacco-fumes. His sense of comfort was greater than any you or I could half conceive.

All at once his eye fell on a marked paragraph in the *Annales Contemporaines*. Had Il Vecchio arranged so that he must see it? Dennison did not know. He hardly wondered, so keen his interest suddenly had grown.

"What's this?" he said, scanning the heading with eager eyes. "Another treatment for senility?"

And quickly he translated:

PROFESSOR PETIT'S EPOCHAL DISCOVERY.

Astonishing results of Intravenal Radium Treatment.

Paris, Dec. 12—The scientific world has just received with astonishment the latest news from the experimental station of Professor Gabriel Petit, at Alfort. According to well-authenticated reports, Professor Petit's claim seems to be substantiated that he has discovered, in radium, a veritable elixir of life.

Having recently injected two doses of radium, of two milligrams each, into the jugular vein of an old and worn-out horse, he finds that now the animal is to all appearances young again. It has put on fat, its coat is glossy, it has grown frisky and supple. A miscroscopic examination of its blood shows a marvelous quantity of new red corpuscles.

Dr. Petit is continuing his experiments, which may prove of great value to mankind. He refuses to be interviewed further on the subject, though he claims to have discovered definitely that radium, administered in intravenal injections, produces a lasting radioactivity in the whole organism, and that the effect is lasting.

Most surprising of all his discoveries is this: that, having treated a second horse in the same manner, and then having administered a solution of sulphate of lead, reverse effects have been obtained, and the process of senility once more set in action. Lead, as is well known, is one of the few metals practically impermeable by radioactive emanations. Further developments are awaited with intense interest in the world of science.

For a moment Dennison stared with astonishment at this momentous news. In these few paragraphs, thus singled out with heavy blue-penciling, he seemed to read something—though just what, he could not tell—far deeper and more weighty than the words themselves made manifest. With a clenching of the fist, a muttered oath, he flung the paper down upon the bench beside him, then fell to pacing up and down the summerhouse.

But presently this temporary uneasiness, this formless agitation passed. The lure and magic of the scene, the soft air and the blue rollers, creaming into windrows of surf along the base of the titanic cliff, won him back to dreamy indolence again.

"Ah, well," he thought, relighting his cigar, "what does it matter, after all? How does this concern me? Let them delve and pry and dig for the unattainable, if they will! I—*I* have no further need to care!"

YET next morning again the indefinable uneasiness possessed him, would not let him rest, drove him out for a walk. And, once more down the mountain and in the little city, he half-instinctively stopped in at a chemist's shop and—impelled by some subconscious force—bought a flask of lead sulphate. At the Hotel des Anglais, he wrote a letter to Dr. Petit, requesting details as to the administration of the sulphate. The reply he requested to be sent to Cette, "*poste restante*," or general delivery.

Had you asked him, point-blank, the meaning of these moves, very likely he could not have told with any clearness. Almost as the Horla itself controlled the thoughts and acts of the hero in de Maupassant's tale, so something far deep down in Dennison's subjectivity dictated its orders. And he, understanding not, obeyed. Fear? No; for he feared nothing now. Prescience? He foresaw nothing save happiness and joy and long continuance of life such as no man before him ever had so much as dreamed. What then? He knew not. He obeyed.

"I must be little better than a fool," he

sneered at himself, with curling lip, as he once more climbed the mountain, "a fool, to have done that! What possible reason can I have? None! This Alkahest, this all-perfect essence, can have nothing in common with such coarse materialism as mere radium! The Alkahest must have the property of bringing organic life to its climax of perfect development and there maintaining it. How long? God knows! Indefinitely, perhaps. For many years, at any rate. So, why this uneasiness?"

And, cursing his own unformulated suspicions, he took the plane-tree avenue of the Château d'Eau Park, and so struck into the steep, little cobbled road which, bounded on either hand by squat stone houses, zig-zagged up the steep.

Twenty minutes later he had reached the gate in the wall, had rung, and been admitted by the Lombard. On the broad path he noticed fresh wheel-tracks. Like a flash the thought surged over him: "Stasia—back again!"

Paling slightly, he stopped. He stared at the Lombard, his heart beginning to pound. "Is—is—has somebody come?" he now stammered.

"Oui, m'sieur."

"Who?"

"M'sieur has but to look," answered the surly fellow, with a nod toward the lawn in front of the house.

Dennison strangely excited, too agitated even to curse the man's grudging answer, hastened forward. Down along the side of the building he hurried, past the beds of tulip and flaming poppy, and turned the corner, out of breath with overmastering emotion.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, and stopped motionless. Stasia was there.

Out on the lawn, under a spreading lime-tree, a table with snowy cloth had been set for an al-fresco *déjeuner*. On one side sat Il Vecchio; opposite him, the girl.

At first Dennison gained only an impression of a mass of dark brown hair, coiled low upon the neck; a white, short-sleeved gown; moving golden lights and purple shades that interplayed through the wind-stirred leaves above. The picture, in all truth beautiful enough, seemed to his super-excited perception some mirage of the imagination, a thing too exquisite to be approached, lest as he should draw near it might dissolve and vanish.

Yet, presently advancing, he found it very real. The fruit, bread, and wine upon the table, the tall silver coffee-percolator diffusing its aroma, the roll of white unsalted butter and the comb of honey—all these vouched for the materiality of the vision.

Stasia and her uncle rose to greet him.

"Ah, friend, just in time to join us!" exclaimed the old man with deep cordiality, grasping the American's hand. "Stasia," and he turned to the girl, "Stasia, see! He has come!"

And, taking her hand, too, he laid it quietly in Dennison's.

Strange, sudden fire burning in his eyes, the American looked at her. His face was pale; his expression intent and very eager. He spoke no word. The rounded contour of Stasia's arm, bare to above the elbow, the warmly swelling curve of breast thrilled him with primal emotions such as he had never known. In silence he let the sight of her stamp itself upon his soul.

A moment their hands thus clung; then very gently the girl loosed her fingers from his grasp.

Instinctively he laid his hand upon his heart, drew back a little and so remained standing there before her, gazing as perhaps some devotee to Isis might tremblingly look upon the mystic veil behind which the supreme mystery of mysteries lay hidden.

IL VECCHIO, meanwhile, watched them with a keenly observant eye, crafty and full of guile. Smiling at length, he coughed slightly, then remarked:

"Come, my children, come; now let us eat. One cannot live, even here, on soft breezes, landscapes, blue waters or—sweet thoughts!"

With a gesture he indicated his own chair to Dennison, then, turning, bade the Lombard bring another from the house.

That was a breakfast such as Dennison had never known, or dreamed. The little white table out there in the warm beauty of that walled garden, with its vistas of pines and fruit-trees, its view of the Mediterranean, its shade and sunlight, became for him enchanted. Whether he ate or not, he could not tell. Stasia's voice, her every gesture, the mere sight of her, the knowledge of her presence, filled him with a wondrous, an unspeakable happiness.

A bird-note, here or there among the branches, the thyme-perfumed breeze, the slow drift of cloud-fleeces across the sky, blended to a perfect background for the wizardry that thralled him. In all his life, never had he experienced a moment so entrancing, never known so bliissful a situation.

Every element of romance seemed to enter there—youth, beauty, perfection, all, everything, there on that massive height beside the Homeric sea. Forgotten was Il Vecchio; yet as the old man watched Stasia distil the coffee or listened to his guest's happy speech, a something in his thin-lipped smile was eloquent of evil.

At length he spoke.

"Now, my children," he said, "you must pardon me. I have a new experiment under way, this morning. So, *au revoir!*"

Rising, he left them. They, scarcely noticing his departure, still sat at table with laughter that echoed among the olive-trees and fragrant sunlit aisles.

Breakfast over, they strolled down to the summer-house. Often as Dennison had studied every detail of the curving coast all the way from Cap d'Agde to Les Stes.-Maries, the sweep of that segment of the gold Riviera never had seemed so perfect as now.

The clustered fishing villages, the little towns and bathing resorts with their gleaming red-tiled roofs, their tiny spires and belfries pricking up through the verdure; the shining flash of surf for miles each way; the twinkle of the copper-domed lighthouse in the sun; even the smudge of a Marseilles steamer far off over the horizon—all, everything, appeared beatified.

Thus an hour sped by—the happiest in Dennison's whole life.

He knew not, and had he known he would probably not have cared, that from a window of the house Il Vecchio was keenly watching them.

For to a soul in paradise what matters anything outside it? And this return of Stasia was to him far more than

CHAPTER XVIII

NEW HORROR

DENNISON'S courtship, thus cavalierly begun, proceeded with well-favored facility. Each day he rose, feeling the strength and vigor of a perfect prime pulsating through him; each day he became more deeply infatuated with this charming girl, with her fascinating ways, her varying moods, her thoughts and turns of sentiment, her delightful speech and never-failing tenderness. Merely to sit and watch her at her embroidery was for him a pleasure so poignant that it banished all thoughts of the future, stilled all questionings, put far away from him the last of his haunting fears.

Such petty details as the status of his visit no longer bore any weight with him. He had almost forgotten his treason to Il Vecchio; he was forgetting his duty, his long-overdue return to his own work and his own life in America; everything had gone by the board—everything, except *her*!

Yet Il Vecchio did not murmur, nor by any word or sign or look was he other than the personification of cordiality. Witham's name was often on his lips, as though that alone constituted an inexhaustible letter of credit for Dennison. And right royally did the American draw upon it.

His days were idleness and adoration, his nights, visions of Stasia. Sometimes, of an evening, he and she would sing together. Or again, they would play duets on the old-fashioned piano in the salon on the second floor. Under Dennison's long-unpractised fingers, which now had regained their one-time suppleness and skill, American airs for the first time echoed through the quaint, high-ceilinged room with its mahogany panelings.

When the girl played, Dennison never tired of sitting in a long chair, dreaming and smoking, watching her, marveling at her extraordinary beauty and at the miracle which had brought him, already an old man, back to enjoyments he had thought forever dead.

Sometimes uneasy recollections of New York crossed his mind; memories of his friends and associates there, of his abandoned profession, and of the stir which his abrupt disappearance must have caused.

"But never mind," he thought. "No man's worth more than nine days of newspaper-wonder. They've long since given up speculating about me! All in my own good time I'll go back to the old life again; no hurry. *Mañana!* Next week will be time enough to start. Next month. Next summer!"

In their many hours together, their walks and talks, their occasional drives down the winding mountain roads out to Beziers or Montpellier, he learned some valuable details concerning Il Vecchio and the peculiar life led here.

He found that Stasia was an orphan, adopted in infancy by the Italian savant, and—except for a few years' schooling in a convent at Tarascon—quite inexperienced in the ways of the outer world.

To her America seemed like a dreamland of enchantments. She never wearied hearing of the marvels which Dennison, by no means minimizing them, poured into her eager ears. American civilization, in reality so noisily crude, pictured itself to her like the visions of a new "Arabian Night."

"When the time comes," he thought, "when the hour is ripe, this will be useful, this new longing for the unknown. Once her eyes are opened to the constrictions of this isolated existence, who knows—"

Temptations, sternly compelling, assailed him; but for the time being he still held them in check.

Then, one night, there happened an accident which suddenly broke down the barrier between them, revealed them to each other, changed all their relations each to each, and once for all made forever impossible any resumption of the thin-woven fiction of mere friendship.

DOWN below the lighthouse, near the Fort St. Pierre abutment of the breakwater, was a boat-livery kept by an old ex-soldier. Rowboats and shallops, small craft of every sort, this ancient worthy let out for little trips along the coast or to the rocky volcanic islets in the bay.

And here, by way of varying their almost daily excursions. Dennison one evening hired a yawl for a run out to the

As he stood there in a drunken stupor the smile died on the girl's face

Ile des Oiseaux, some two miles off shore. Il Vecchio, seemingly immersed in his studies and in some new experiments now under way, made no prohibition. With a paternal kindness he acquiesced.

"Only," he warned, "be careful of the gulls' nests. No one disturbs them. They cling by thousands to the rocks along the seaward side. There is a story, still told in Cette, of an English tourist who once tried to collect a dozen eggs, for specimens. And do you know what happened? Well," with an expressive shrug, "well, the gulls picked his eyes clean out, my friend. Blind. Stone blind. Therefore, do not disturb them. They're not aggressive; but, once aroused, they fight to kill!"

Dennison merely smiled.

"I know," he said. "Come, Stasia. And bring the guitar."

That was the night of nights. The full moon, round and yellow and warm, flooded the sea with molten gold. A broad path of light opened before them as the little boat, under his skilful guidance, sailed with a favoring breeze away from the high, rugged shore.

At the tiller sat Dennison. Stasia half reclined amidships, banked in with rugs and cushions. The moonlight on the waves reminded Dennison of "Colomba," and of the wild romance which had taken place in Corsica, not far away to eastward. He thrilled with strange emotions.

"Will you sing?" he asked.

She, smiling with a grave sweetness, let her fingers wander a moment upon the strings; then, striking a minor chord, lifted her voice in the old love-song: "Par Une Nuit de Rêve." And, blending with the ripple of the sea, the solemn breathing of the night, the song floated up, away, in melody such as perhaps, the blest may hear in paradise. Far from the mountain flashed the stabbing beam of the Pharos. A few mild, wondering stars looked down upon them. Dennison, suffused with ineffable passion, so exquisite as to partake of pain, listened and looked and held his breath for very wonder.

They landed safely on a beach of silver sand, on the landward side of the island. He helped the girl out, drove the anchor firmly into the beach, and for a moment stood breathing the charm, the magic of that half-tropic splendor. Then he said, pointing upward at the summit of the isle:

"Come, Stasia!"

He offered her his hand. Together, tranced, beatified, they climbed the winding path that led to the top, two hundred feet above.

As they went, pausing now and then to listen or to look, the dark, gold-banded floor of the inland sea opened out to their gaze. Millions of tiny sparkling flashes wove that ribbon of glory. On Stasia's face the moonlight, warm as only it can be in that enchanted region, fell with a soft effulgence.

And, Dennison, yearning toward her, found no word to speak.

They had already reached a point more than a hundred feet above the beach, when all at once the girl uttered a sharp cry of pain, staggered and fell. Her hand escaped his. Crying out in fear, she clung to the very edge of the dark and precipitous path, her ankle turned by a loose, rolling stone.

On the instant, Dennison seized her. Before she had had time to fall, his powerful arms had dragged her back to safety.

"Not hurt, little one?" he cried, kneeling beside her. "Not hurt? Tell me!"

She, biting her lip to restrain herself, did not answer. But in her eyes he saw the gleam of involuntary tears of pain.

And, a great passion sweeping through him, he caught her in his arms.

The perfumed masses of her hair intoxicated, maddened him. The warmth of her burned away his last remaining vestiges of self-control. He drew her close to his breast; he sheltered her; with a surging, an unspeakable up-rush of love he called her name.

He felt her arm about his neck. It tightened, tremblingly.

And then his lips sought her mouth.

So did their brief and all-too-transitory hour of bliss begin. So for them were fleetingly opened gates of paradise.

At length, beatified by love, they two came back over the summer sea, from the high, rocky Ile des Oiseaux.

And there were other kisses, other words and plightings in the garden, among the odorous rose-trees, before she left him.

Then for a long, long time he walked in the fading moonlight; for a long time he sat and thought, alone, down in the vine-shrouded darkness of the pergola.

Midnight tolled from the far cathedral in the town, solemnly marking one dead day from another yet to live, but still

Dennison remained there, far above the surf, communing with his own inspired soul.

At last, when the moon began to pale, he arose. Filled with the joy of it all, he sought his room.

Five minutes later, pale as chalk, wild-eyed and with disheveled hair, he cringed before his mirror, a candle in his palsied hand.

The face he saw in the glass was hardly recognizable.

"Merciful God!" he gasped, and stared again, then burst into hysteric laughter.

Then, choking, unable to make any sound at all, he stood there gripping the edge of his dressing-table; with panic-smitten eyes he gazed at his livid countenance. Cold pinpoints of sweat pricked out on his forehead. His heart beat with dull haste. He shook so horribly that he could scarcely hold himself erect.

"The Alkahest—again!" he whispered raucously.

Only too true. During the night the hellish elixir, periodic in its action, had been at work again.

The features he now looked at, with wild and horror-blasted eyes, were no longer those of a man in the full, virile prime and flood of life.

No; save for the color of the eyes and the general contour of the face, Dennison could hardly have recognized himself.

At the utmost estimate, he now appeared scarce one-and-twenty. And the end—the end was not yet come.

CHAPTER XIX

FLIGHT

ALMOST fainting with numb terror, Dennison set the candle down, staggered back to his chair, fell into it, and burying his head in both hands, began rocking to and fro in an abandon of hideous despair.

Wordless and dumb, except for a little moan from time to time, he fought his fight.

At last, unable to keep quiet any longer, he sprang up and fell to pacing the floor. Every few minutes he stopped, and by the wavering candle-light, again studied his transformed face, hoping against hope his eyes might have deceived him. But no—always the same sight met his gaze.

Anguished beyond the limit of anything he had thought possible, his brain a whirling maze of torture, a thousand thoughts, fears, wonders, agonies all beat upon his racked and riven consciousness.

Fear, now at last, had driven its grip right through and through his soul. Fear so sickening, so hideously inexorable, that his face grew gray, his eyes glared wildly at thought of what the future might bring forth—what it *must!*

"No, no, no!" cried he, shivering, his teeth beginning to chatter. He threw out his arms, as though to ward off this intangible, this mercilous vampirism of the Alkahest, this thing he could by no means on earth reach or deal or grapple with. "No, no! It must not be! *It cannot!"*

Yet, all this time, far down in the depths of his soul, he knew it could—it must!

For the first time in all his life, he stood now face to face with a train of thought he dared not carry to its logical, its only possible conclusion. For the first time, confronted by a series of scientific crises, by a new kind of involution—a natural process, an inescapable concatenation—he found himself shrinking like a mere child that fears the darkness of an empty, unseen room.

And, strong man that he still was, he covered his eyes with his clasped hands, sank to the floor and for a long time remained there, stupefied with horror.

Only from time to time some disconnected word escaped him, some meaningless, futile scrap of prayer to a power which heeded him no more than it might a crushed worm or wounded ant.

The candle burned low. It smoked, flickered, and at last went out, drowned in a little pool of melted wax. The charred wick glowed red for a while, filling the room with a smell of charred cotton.

Darkness fell.

Dennison roused himself. Unsteadily he crawled on hands and knees to the bed, got up onto it, and lay there distorted. Then, after a long while, his troubled breathing grew calmer. He slept.

After a certain while, a soft step crept along the hallway, outside the American's door. It stopped there. Silence. Then very gently the door-knob turned. The door soundlessly opened two or three inches. Dennison did not awake or even stir.

For a minute or two, no sound save the

American's sighing breath. A tall form was standing in the doorway, listening acutely, watching with eyes which by some special power or secret of their own could penetrate the gloom.

Finally, as though quite satisfied, the watcher noiselessly closed the door again, and—quiet as a cat—withdrew along the pitch-black corridor.

DENNISON awoke, at early dawn, dazed and in a thoroughly confused state of mind.

At first he could not understand what had happened, or why he should be lying there fully dressed upon the bed, with the windows and blinds fast-closed, the scent of the burned-out candle still fouling the air.

But almost immediately he recollected everything—the happenings upon the Ile des Oiseaux, the horrible discovery, all. The sight of the mirror, of the candlestick, and the disordered bed recalled him to himself. And with a sick, unreasoning surge of terror he leaped up, flung open the windows, ran to the dresser and, haggard with fear, again studied his face by daylight.

"A nightmare—a horrible dream—it must have been!" he cried. "The candlelight must have deceived me!" Against certainty he still hoped that no reality lay in these frightful terrors.

But no! By the garish, unsparing glow of morning, which pearled in myriad hues along the eastern sky, the horrible truth stood out more patently than ever. At once he realized that it was all too true, that fate already was outstretching its inexorable claws to grip him, that now he could forsee some hideous tragedy impending.

And, sick, shaken, trembling, he was forced to admit what he already knew. Despite the marks of suffering which the broken night of terror had left upon him, his face now looked unmistakably even younger than when he had stared at its pale reflection by candle-light.

Though he could not yet analyze this thing, yet it seemed as though the realization of the truth had in some psychic manner acted on his physical structure; as though the barrier of denial, once definitely swept aside, had let the flood of admission sweep through and had accelerated the fatal process.

His agony of soul could find no fitting expression in the youthful features which now were his. Even the thought of Stasia and his relations with her, his pledges and his vows, though they shot him through with intense, humiliating agony, could make no corresponding impress on his countenance. There recurred to him a sinister memory of Hugo's "Man Who Laughs,"—the man so mutilated in youth that, whatever his later sufferings, he still must bear a smile.

And, now seeing himself so young and fresh and strong, while in his heart the canker of sick despair was gnawing, he burst into a raw laugh of mockery.

"The Man Who Laughs"! he cackled; then shrank back with a cry. While his wild eyes roved feverishly about the room, he stood there trembling. All at once he burst into sudden tears, and fell to pacing the tiled floor.

He shook his fist at the mockery of the fresh, verdant morning, perfumed with all the beauty of the Riviera. To his lips rose curses against Il Vecchio and all the old man's scientific necromancy.

Like a trapped rat the wretch stood there, unable to do anything, knowing not which way to turn, "cribbed, cabined and confined" within this maze of horror.

All at once he uttered a sharp exclamation. A thought had struck him.

"What?" he cried.

He stopped his pacing. Curiously he looked down at his hands and arms, then felt of his shoulders. He plucked the cloth of his sleeves.

"Loose? Too loose, now?" he gulped.

It seemed, indeed, that the coat was a bit large through the shoulders. What then? His body had also begun to shrink? His very frame was diminishing?

At this frightful realization he turned, very pale, to his clothes-closet, fetched out a bottle of cognac from the shelf, and, pouring himself a stiff drink, swallowed it neat at one draft.

"Ugh!" he shuddered, with a wry face. "How I hate that poison, now! I used to like it—before. But now, in this infernal state of physical perfection, the very smell nauseates me!"

Stimulated by the alcohol, he felt better almost at once. Perhaps, after all, something might yet be done to obviate the impending calamity, to deceive the girl, even to achieve happiness. A killing anger surged his breast. At thought of Il Vecchio his fist clenched and his eyes grew deadly bitter. "Wait!" he exclaimed, continuing his preparations.

FIRST he got his satchel, packed a few necessary articles and made sure the bottle of lead sulphate was in it—the bottle he had some time before bought secretly down in the village.

Then, sitting down at the table in his room, he drew out his fountain-pen and wrote a note to Stasia. After several futile attempts, each of which he tore up and flung into the waste-basket, he framed this missive:

Dear Girl:

Unavoidable business calls me away from you for a few days. Much as I hate to leave you for even so short a time, I must. When I shall be with you again, I cannot say, but it will be very soon—at the very earliest possible moment.

Ask no questions, my most dear one. Have no fears, no doubts. Heaven lies before us. What a future shall be ours! A thousand times I kiss you. *Au revoir!*

Your lover,
Granville.

This he sealed, addressed, and, stealing a-tiptoe out along the hallway, thrust with trembling fingers beneath the door of her room.

For a moment he stood there, head bowed, eyes closed, in silent farewell. Then he bent, and very gently kissed a panel of his sweetheart's door.

"Good-by!" he whispered. "My love, my soul! Good-by. God grant it may not be forever!"

Ten minutes later he had escaped silently from the house, traversed the garden, let himself out of the gate, and swinging his satchel bravely, was striding down the mountain in the clear glow of early morning.

He caught the six-twelve Mediterranean-Paris express, which would land him that same afternoon in the capital. A little study of the "Guide Jaune" informed him that Alfort, where lay Professor Gabriel Petit's laboratories, was a small town some two miles outside the Paris fortifications to southwest of the city.

"I shall be there this evening," he assured himself. "From Petit's lips, at whatever cost, I shall learn the proper method of applying this lead treatment."

But though he bought all the illustrated reviews and tried to immerse himself in them, gnawing fear and anxiety still dogged him. There rose before him visions of the rock-chamber and the line of eighteen coffins.

"Oh, my soul!" he breathed, gazing with terror-haunted eye at the speeding valley of the Rhone. "Oh, my soul! When will this torture end?"

Stasia, meanwhile—having found and, with tear-dimmed eyes, read his note—had made pitifully undiplomatic inquiries of her uncle.

Il Vecchio soothed her with a smile. Laying a hand upon her head, he answered:

"Have no fear, my child. He will return. He cannot stay away for long. I tell you that because I know it. I swear it to you! Within a week he will be with you, here."

"But, uncle, why—"

"Don't ask anything more, Stasia! All in good time you shall know this and—and many other things. Now, leave me. I must be alone."

Then as the girl, disconsolate and lonely, wandered out with sad longing into the mockery of that sunlit garden, the patriarch took down his volume of hieroglyphic records and set to work making an extended entry.

His smile, as he bent over this unholy work, was one such as no man would wish to look upon a second time.

CHAPTER XX

TWO OUNCES OF CYANID

EVEN sooner than the old man had predicted, Dennison returned. For on the evening of the fifth day, pale and furtive and notably even younger-looking than when he had taken such unceremonious leave, he scaled the wall, dropped into the high grass, and, peering about him like a thief, crept toward the old-fashioned house.

A moment he halted in the shadows of the olive-grove, to spy out the approach. The gibbous moon, just rising, cast a reddish, dull glow over everything. Dennison seemed to fear even that uncertain light.

"If only—if only *she* doesn't see me!" he whispered, eagerly sweeping the open space of lawn, the paths and flower-beds with anxious eyes. "She—she mustn't!"

Careful inspection satisfied him the way was clear to Il Vecchio's study door. And, assuring himself by the light which burned within, showing through the long seaward-looking windows, that the patriarch was probably reading or at work in that peaceful room, he made a quick

crouching run for the door which opened off the lawn. Not waiting to knock, he opened the door and crept in.

Dennison found himself once more in presence of his host, now his arch-enemy, destroyer of his manhood and his life. Standing there a moment, blinking at the old man—who sat comfortably in an easy-chair, long pipe in mouth, feet slippered, and with a tome upon his knees—the American's face twitched with a sudden spasm of hate.

But he controlled it. The hate died out, overcome by the more dominant fear, the terror which obsessed him. In presence of this master of his very soul, Dennison seemed to cringe and shrink, despite his hatred and his rage.

Il Vecchio looked up, smiling a quiet, cordial welcome. But Dennison did not smile in return. He staggered toward the patriarch and flung his hands out, in an abandon of despair.

"Save me!" he gasped. "For Heaven's sake, save me—before it's hopeless! Before it is too late!"

Showing no slightest sign or mark of surprise, Il Vecchio calmly laid down his book. He gazed at the newcomer. Under the lamp-light the rims of his glasses glinted paternally.

"So you are back again?" he asked, very kindly. "Welcome home, my friend! You must be weary. Sit down and rest a while; then we can talk. I will have my Lombard bring fruit and wine. Here are cigars." He nodded at the box upon the table.

Dennison, silent for a moment, stared at him with eyes that burned like coals. The studied politeness of the old man was to him like the turning of a knife-blade in a raw wound. But he restrained himself; he checked the scalding words that seethed within him.

"And did you find Professor Petit, at Alfort?" resumed the old man, casually, as though asking the time of day, "A splendid man, that; a true scholar! One of the few!"

"What?" cried Dennison. "How—how do you know—where I've been?"

Il Vecchio smiled very dryly.

"Oh, that," said he, "is a mere detail. The really vital thing is that Petit, of course, couldn't do anything for you. Positively nothing at all, is it not so, my friend? And that you have come back here to me, after all, just as I said you would. And now?"

Dennison clenched both his fists. Il Vecchio's patronage infuriated him.

"You demon!" he cried, in a trembling voice. "If I told all I knew, if I denounced—"

"Come, come," interrupted the aged man, raising a lean hand. "Come now, no childish follies. Nobody would believe you. You ask my aid. Do not annoy me. Be wise; be reasonable. What do you now require?"

FOR a moment Dennison, outraged beyond even the possibility of words, grew a shade paler. But he restrained himself. For the first time of his whole existence, he felt in his heart the killing impulse. Had he been a crude, an untrained man, giving way to the lusts of murder, he could have gladly flung himself upon that sarcastic, smiling patriarch and strangled him with naked hands.

But as it was, he held himself. Biting his lip until it grew dull purple, he managed to articulate:

"Yes, I—have failed. Petit's treatment, quite useless! Unless you rescue me, I—*I am lost!*"

Suddenly he felt a thrill of envy. Even in his torture, he realized for the first time, he understood at last the beauty and the righteousness of age. As though a veil had been drawn away from before his eyes, he perceived the dignity of Il Vecchio's high, bald forehead, of that aquiline nose, those sunken yet all-comprehending eyes. And an unspeakable yearning possessed him for the boon, the blessing of sanctitude.

The thing which but a few weeks before had seemed to him so hideous, so hateful, now suddenly assumed a different aspect. And with a secret wonder in his keen distress, he found himself yearning for Il Vecchio's ripened years, for the great and lasting peace which soon must come to this old man.

Il Vecchio spoke first.

"Well, my son," he said, judicially, "I understand your request. But I cannot sympathize with it. I cannot grasp your sorrow. You came to me, seeking to be saved from senile decay. You *have* been saved; yet you still grieve!

"Had you asked me, before having committed that great treason against my whole life's work, I could have told you the futility of your own striving.

"Do you not remember Dean Swift's

famous 'struldbrugs,' or immortals, and all the horrors of their unnatural lives? You should have thought of things such as that. But no. Rashly you seized the forbidden thing. You have what you desired. And still you sorrow. Illogical, to say the least?"

"Save me!" gasped Dennison, trembling and ashy pale.

Il Vecchio shook his head.

"Listen," he commanded. "You must thoroughly understand the truth. You must admit that not the slightest guilt attaches to me. Upon your own head is now falling the inevitable result of your own deed. Your treason, the unspeakable wrong you have done me—from these your punishment has automatically sprung!"

"But now—"

"Your treachery," continued the old man, quite unmoved, still drawing at his pipe, "has brought ruin to a whole long life of patient and difficult research, has wrecked my whole career, and, by its gross, incredible egoism, destroyed with one single act the *summa perfectionis* of three thousand years!

"Once for all," and Il Vecchio's voice grew cold and keen, "know this; that no threat of yours, nō violence has any weight with me. I am too old, too weary now to care. Kill me—no matter. But you do not dare! You are afraid to fight your battle to the end, without me! You are afraid!"

"Oh, yes, yes!" groaned Dennison, hiding his face in his hands. "I—I can't go on this way! I can't! Help me! Counteract this fiendish thing! Give me old age again!"

Il Vecchio smiled.

"Be calm," he commanded. "This is no time for emotional outbursts. Science knows nothing of such things, takes no heed of joy or sorrow, understands only causation and result, inexorable as fate. You lie in her hands, and mine. You are wholly in my power. You have been, from the very first. With what forbearance have I acted! Any other man than I would have taken vengeance, and—"

"Vengeance, you fiend?" shouted Dennison, advancing menacingly. "What vengeance could you have taken that would have equaled this? Here you have kept me like an inoculated rabbit, a mere pathological guinea-pig, to study my symptoms and observe—"

"Silence!" commanded the patriarch, half-rising. An angry flush mounted across his sunken cheeks—the first sign of any real emotion since the fatal moment when Dennison had betrayed his confidence. "Silence, I say! Or out you go into the world again, lost, hopeless, doomed!

"Go, if you will! Drag yourself from consultation-room to consultation-room, all over Europe! There can be no help for you, anywhere except here. Outside, your story would suffice to have you judged insane. You would be lucky to escape the madhouse and a still more hideous death than may come to you here!"

"DEATH?" gasped Dennison, with bloodless lips. "Death? What? Must I die? Can you not turn back the course of this infernal Alkahest, give me my prime again, and let me live my normal life to its right ending? Oh, Heavens! Death, did you say?"

Il Vecchio, sitting down again, smiled quietly, and reached for his tobacco.

"Again I bid you, be calm," he warned. "Here you are in friendly hands, despite all your treason. Had it not been so, my Lombard—who asks nothing better than to serve you—would long ago have flung your body, weighted with leaden plummets, down into the forty fathoms of blue water beneath the cliffs. This is no time for mock-heroics or vain lamentations. You must face conditions as they are, and so adjust yourself that the transition shall be as easy as possible. Do you not understand?"

Dennison did not answer, but he drew a little vial out of his pocket. At sight of it, his bloodshot eyes brightened, his writhen lips almost smiled. Il Vecchio, busily lighting his pipe, seemed to pay no attention. When the tobacco was burning well, the old man continued:

"Death, after all," he said, "is not the greatest evil. Blessed are they who can attain it peacefully, lying down to their last long sleep unmutilated and in peace, as nature wills it. Once I fought against the thought of dissolution. It was that fight which led me into the long years of research which, at the very end, you checkmated—you, my guest, my trusted friend!

"No matter; I see more clearly now. Death may even become a boon. Metchnikoff is right when he says that, after the life-work is done, the instinct for

dying replaces the instinct for living."

He ceased, then, reaching out, pressed an electric button at the side of his reading-table.

"What are you doing there?" demanded Dennison, with sudden hot suspicion.

"Merely summoning my niece," answered the old man very gently. "She, poor girl, has been mourning her heart away ever since you so abruptly took your leave. She made me promise to let her know at once, when you returned. Now you are here, I call her. Well?"

An expression of horror transformed the American's face.

"Why—why—" he stammered. "She can't see me now, this way! She *mustn't!* I've lost five years since—since last time! Great Heavens, this can't be!"

"It can, and must!" replied Il Vecchio sternly.

All Dennison's self-control seemed to slide, to slip away from him like a torn garment, too long held together.

"For God's sake, do not inflict this thing on me!" he wailed.

Gone, now, the stern decision of manliness, the fighting strength, the virile driving power of but a few weeks before. Il Vecchio felt how little he had personally to fear this weakened, diminished mockery of a man who had been Dennison. The American's voice, now pleading, broke with boyish trebles.

"Spare me this!" he cried. "Have I not suffered enough, already, to atone? Is there no way to stop the course of this diabolic thing?"

Il Vecchio shook his hoary head, with a wise, sad, weary smile.

"As you have sown, so must you reap," he answered.

"Can nothing avail?"

"Nothing! I could not save you now if I wanted to!"

"No hope?"

"None!"

"Then—then I cheat you this way!" cried the tortured victim.

He uncorked the vial in his hand. Il Vecchio made no slightest move to hinder him, but merely watched with tolerant half-interest.

"Now I shall free myself from you forever!"

"Cyanid?" queried the old man, calmly as though merely asking the name of some familiar wine.

But Dennison, speaking no further word, set the vial to his lips, and in a spasm of mad anguish drained the fearful poison, whereof—to any other man except he—the smallest drop meant instantaneous, black, annihilating death!

CHAPTER XXI

VECCHIO DISSECTS TWO HUMAN SOULS

WITH a cry of triumph, Dennison dashed the vial to the tiling.

Shattered, it flew into myriad fragments.

"Now, now I shall die!" he screamed, his voice shrill and horrible with desperate exultation.

But, though he closed his eyes, gripped his head between both hands, and stood there swaying, utterly undone by the suggestion of impending death, nothing happened.

A burning, tingling sensation in mouth and throat was all he felt—this, and almost immediately a somewhat stimulated throbbing of the heart.

Dazed, uncomprehending, he opened his eyes.

"What?" he stammered. "Am I dreaming? Is this death? Where am I?"

"Where, my friend?" smiled Il Vecchio, drawing calmly at his long pipe as he still sat in his chair, observing everything with amusement. "Why, where should you be? Here in my study, of course. Come, now; you are overwrought, exhausted. Let me advise—"

"But, Heaven! The *cyanid!*" gasped Dennison, staggering back. "Two ounces! And I still—*still live?*"

"Why not?"

"But—"

"Ah, my friend, you are not now as other men. You—"

"I—*what?*" cried the unhappy wretch, grasping the edge of the table for support. "You—you mean to say that—nothing—"

"Precisely so," nodded Il Vecchio, puffing comfortable volumes of latakia smoke. "The Alkahest explains it all. A universal solvent, my son. Not only—"

"You demon!"

"Not only against senility," continued the old man, quite unmoved, "but also against every other noxious drug or poison whatsoever. Nothing of that sort can harm you now. Nothing at all."

Dennison, sinking down into a chair beside the table, dashed his clenched fists against his forehead.

"No help? No hope?" he wailed.

The patriarch merely smiled again; yet those old eyes reflected the lamplight with a hard, metallic glitter.

"Let me advise you, as I said a moment ago," he remarked. "Poisons are now but stimulants to you. The more virulent they would be to an ordinary man, so much the more strongly will they act on you. But you are immune from their toxicity. Entirely, absolutely so. A thousand tests, reactions and experiments already have proved this, beyond all range of question."

Dennison merely groaned. Already the preliminary symptoms of strong stimulation were beginning to make themselves felt. As when a man swallows a glass of whiskey on an empty stomach, so the cyanid was beginning to quicken his pulse, numb his lips and daze his brain.

"If this were only death!" he longed. "Death, noble and liberating, instead of a mere vulgar intoxication!" With an extreme bitterness of soul he writhed as he sat there, clasped his strained hands together, and, taking long breaths, sought to fight off the hateful and degrading symptoms.

As from a great distance, the patriarch's voice still came to him—even, quiet, cold:

"Venoms can only make you drunk; no more. The coral-snake, the cobra, the dread kariat—all these have now become innocuous to you. Animal, vegetable and mineral poisons alike are powerless, except only that certain alkaloidal toxins may in all probability possess a certain tonic quality and somewhat accelerate the progress of your inverted evolution. In which case—"

"Stop!" cried Dennison in a shrill, horrible voice. He started up. Reeling, he stood there, bleared and horrible, in spite of his perfect bodily health. A humming, a whirling in his brain, had almost banished thought; but one idea, one supreme desire, had struggled through the ruck of disjointed mental images. He must escape!

"Stop, you fiend!" he choked again; and, sickened with fear lest Stasia should find him there, started with reeling steps toward the door.

But, before he had traversed half the distance, he started back with a guttural, wordless gasp.

There before him, summoned by the diabolic ingenuity, the cold and calculating malice of Il Vecchio, stood the girl.

FOR a moment all the drunken, poison-bred hallucinations died within him. His back was toward the light, while she, framed like a gracious picture in the doorway, was facing it.

He saw her eager, expectant look, the smile upon her oft-kissed lips, the wonder in her eyes.

Then, with outstretched hands, and with a little cry of greeting and of joy, she came toward him. Just a trifle confused by the lamplight; by the issuance from darkness; deeply agitated by her lover's sudden, unannounced return, she for a moment detected nothing of the hideous change that had come over him.

But as he still stood there, swaying a little, not running to meet her, to seize her hands, to clasp her in his arms, a change drew over her face.

The smile died. A doubt, a sudden vague and indefinable fear, replaced it. She drew her hands back upon her breast.

"Granville?" she cried. "What—what is it?"

He laughed harshly, unable to control the delirium any longer—the madness of intoxication in his dazed and riven brain.

He took a step toward her. But she shrank back, terror in her eyes.

"No, no!" she gasped. *"Oh, mon Dieu!* What is it? What—what has happened?"

"Stasia!" mumbled Dennison, madly fighting for self-mastery, for coherence, even though his subjectivity realized how futile was that fight, how pitiable, how mean a figure he was making. "Stasia—listen! He—he has given me—he—uncle—I—"

"You see," interrupted the calm, dispassionate voice of the old man. "You understand, my dear. Now at last you know the reason of our guest's sudden disappearance and his—"

"Lies! All, all lies!" wailed the miserable wretch, staggering in his tracks. His speech was thick, all but incomprehensible. "Stasia—listen to—me! He—gave—"

But the girl, with a cry of utter disillusionment, of pain and anguish that pierced even the numbing senses of the tortured Dennison, repulsed him.

"No! No! Keep away—away from me!" she cried. "What is it? Uncle, tell me!"

Until this moment Dennison had thought his tortures as acute as any man could bear, and live. Right up to and past the crisis of attempted suicide they had driven him. But now, dazed and stunned as he was by the hellish rack of the cyanid pulsing through his fever-drunken brain, he felt a deeper anguish, sharp as the fabled pangs of Hades itself.

Swimming in a dark haze, with crimson and purple blotches that ever burst and faded and reformed again, he seemed to catch intermittent glimpses of the girl.

And as he saw those wonderful dark eyes widen with fear, then with horror and repugnance and unspeakable scorn, he knew—through all his drunkenness—that not yet had he drained the bitter cup of Il Vecchio's vengeance to its lowest dregs.

THE agony of seeing another human being, an innocent and helpless victim—the woman among all women whom he loved—indissolubly bound up with his fate, inevitably forced to suffer for his treason, drove him mad.

For the first time he knew the torture of dealing death to the soul.

And, frenzied with the effort to bring his numb tongue and his palsied body under some control, to tell her what had happened, to explain, he reeled right toward her, babbling like a maniac.

He had a vision of her hair, her warm and lovely throat, her bare arms, the slender hands with which she now repelled him.

"Stasia! Lis-*listen* to—me!" he panted, fighting as a man fights in the last stage of drowning.

But she, loosed now from the dumbness caused by this awful, and to her, utterly incomprehensible change, screamed something—what he knew not—some wild, passionate, terrible thing of which the echoes rang like tocsins in his humming ears.

Then, flinging out both hands in an abandon of horror, she turned and fled. Like a white bird she vanished into the night.

"Stasia!" he screamed with maniac laughter. No answer—she was gone!

Dennison laughed again, a weakly foolish laugh, the laugh of a man far gone in liquor.

Nodding to himself, shaking, he turned to the grim patriarch.

Il Vecchio was still sitting there, in the same chair, whence he had never moved since Dennison's return a half-hour before. Still comfortably smoking that long pipe, still observing all this wreck and ruin of human lives, as though seated in a box at the opera, he smiled as he sagely shook his head.

And, at the dim-glimmering sight of him, with his last feeble sparks of reason Dennison felt the birth of a hate so bitter, so violent and ghastly, that for a second it cleared the intoxication from his brain.

"You—*you'll* die anyway!" he shrieked. "Not for—what you have done to me, you viper! Not—for all your scores of murders! But—for—*her!*

On the reading-table lay a Chinese paper-cutter, a long steel blade set in a haft of dragon-carved ivory. The dragon had ruby eyes. They gleamed blood-red in Dennison's disordered sight.

He snatched up the dagger. And lunged toward Il Vecchio. Froth lay upon his lips; his livid face, drawn and distorted, was a mask of living hate. His bared teeth clicked with the lust of the kill.

But Il Vecchio, judging, gaging every movement, every breath and quiver of that tortured being, never even moved.

The only sign of perturbation that he gave was momentarily to stop smoking. For a few seconds the ebony pipe-stem hung suspended, while the thick old lips puckered themselves into a mocking smile.

"You'll—die!" futilely brawled Dennison.

"Look out there, fool!" warned the patriarch. "You'll hurt yourself with that knife! Look out!"

Suddenly all the springs of Dennison's being relaxed. His hand dropped, palsied and nerveless. The knife clattered over the tiling. He pitched forward.

An instant he caught himself. Then, with a foolish, maundering cry, he fell.

"The idiot!" sneered Il Vecchio, and reached for a match.

With keen, serpentlike eyes he studied the prostrate figure sprawled out there before him in helpless surrender.

Then he rang the servants' call-bell twice.

PRESENTLY the Lombard appeared.

"Get me the fifth bottle on that shelf there," commanded the master. He poured a draft into a glass. Bending,

while Lombard held up Dennison's head, he forced the medicine between the set teeth.

He raised the right eyelid and for a moment studied the dilated pupil, expressionless, horrible.

"H-m!" he grunted non-commitally.

He straightened up. With his slippered foot he stirred the unconscious body.

"Too much wine," he said in Italian. "You understand. Carry him off to bed. And, on the way, tell old Marianella to wait on my niece. She may need something; she may be ill. Remember!"

"I understand."

"Very well. Now go! And be very careful in undressing him. No harm must come to him in any way. This is important; highly so!"

"Very well, sir," answered the Lombard. Despite his brutish stupidity and his subservience to Vecchio, there lurked in his eyes a secret fear, a wonder, a superstitious dread which echoed in his voice. "Very well. I understand. He is not sick, the *Americano?*"

"No; only a little temporary disturbance. In the morning he will be himself again. And—h-m!—Lombard!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Whatever happens, you are to see nothing, hear nothing, ask nothing!"

"Yes, sir."

"Even though something should take place which seems to you contrary to reason—seems like a miracle—you are to ask no questions. No questions now or ever! Marianella, she, too, must be blind and dumb. I will speak to her. But you, now remember this: you see nothing, you speak of nothing! Otherwise—well—it may not be pleasant for you. And you know my power!"

"Yes—yes, sir!" whispered the menial with a scared side-glance.

"Very well. Now take him to bed!"

The Lombard bowed, picked up the limp body as easily as though it had been that of a baby, and departed.

When he had disappeared with his burden, Vecchio walked over to the fireplace and for a moment stood there pensively gazing down into the pleasant glow of the cedar logs.

Turning back at length to his easy-chair, he spoke.

"The last outburst," he said under his breath. "The last up-flare, the very last. From now on no danger. None whatever! From now on he is mine. He belongs to me—and to my records—body and soul. If he resists, there is the laboratory. I'm ready for that, too!"

Thoughtfully, he sat smoking a little while. Then, picking up his "Annals of Ophthalmic Surgery," he once more began his interrupted reading.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CAGE

NO DANGER! None whatever, any more! In this, for almost the first time in his long, cold, analytically calculating life, Il Vecchio was mistaken. For when, toward quarter of eleven the next morning, Dennison's blurred consciousness again struggled through the weltering abysses of intoxication, and with an aching head and bloodshot eyes he sat up in bed, the first clear thought within his brain was murder.

In spite of his burning thirst, his parched, ill-tasting mouth, and the iron ring of pain that circled his brow, there came to him memories of nearly all that had happened the night before, of his attempted suicide, his defeat, the horrible meeting with Stasia, and the foul, dishonorable means employed by his tormentor, forever to discredit and vilify him in the eyes of the woman he adored.

He recalled, too, though only as a vague, distorted nightmare, his abortive attempt to kill the savant with the paper-cutter. And, though only the beginning of that attack remained in his memory, he felt subconsciously that it had not succeeded.

"If—if it had, and—I'd given him what he deserves," gasped Dennison, with dry, cracked lips, "I certainly shouldn't be here, in bed. So then—I failed, last night? All right—to-day we'll see! *Now*, at once!"

Weakly, dizzily he clambered out of bed. So shaken was he, so undone, that for a moment he had to hold fast to the back of a chair to keep from falling. But presently, setting his teeth hard, moving by a sheer imperative of the will, he proceeded to his wash-stand.

His every symptom closely paralleled those of a man recovering from a deep intoxication. Nausea, excessive thirst, headache, all were there. Not all his rage and fortitude could wholly repress the groan that forced itself from between his dry, cracked lips.

Deep drafts of water and a thorough sluicing of his head, neck and chest presently revived him to the point where he was able to find, among his things, some bromid tablets. And now, somewhat soothed by the influence of a tremendous dose, the wondrous physical vigor, the perfect force and life within him rapidly threw off the effects of that annihilating toxin.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, as almost visibly the blood crept back to his wan cheek, the color brightened in his eye. "What inconceivable power must lie in that infernal Alkahest! Two ounces of cyanid — and I still live! Two full ounces of a poison of which one drop is instant death, and all the harm I take from it is a mere overstimulation! If this is not a miracle, what is?"

But though his scientific mind wondered in awe and trembling at this unbelievable thing, the canker of killing passion in his heart by no means subsided. Rather, as his vital forces now returned, fresh, full and vigorous, that hatred waxed and grew, and, dressing quickly, Dennison began to lay his plans for what he hoped would be the final act of this heart-racking drama of life, and death, and fate.

"This time," he said, "no failure! This time I'll take that fiend unawares. Fool that I was to have appealed to him! To have exposed my weakness and my terror. To have dreamed even for an instant that such sentiments as pity or forgiveness could find lodgment in his vulturous heart!

"Fool that I was to have declared myself his executioner! If I had possessed even the elementary common sense to mask my plans, that fiend might even now have paid the price of his crimes against me and against the whole life-process of the universe!

"But—well, what's done is done. I must have been quite hopelessly drunk with the reaction of that poison; there's no other possible way to account for what I did. This time, however, *this* time—"

For a while he stood in deep and concentrated thought. Then his campaign of action fully matured, he took another deep, refreshing drink of water, carefully adjusted his dress—now notably too big for him—and assured himself that his appearance was almost normal.

This done, he left the room.

"At this hour of the morning," he thought, making his way along the hall toward the stairs, "I shall be practically sure to find him in the lower garden, down among the new-set orange trees.

"That's a good fifth of a mile from the house. Stasia won't be visible to-day! I'm positive of that. And Marianella is quite deaf.

"When, then, there's only the Lombard to consider. If he's with the old man, it will be easy enough to send him on some plausible errand or other. Even though I have shrunk so, in the past week, the old man is still no match for me in strength. Match for me? Pshaw! I could break him as I might a rotten stick! And, not a hundred yards from the lower garden, the cliff—hello, what the deuce!"

HIS calculations ended in a sharp word of surprise as he reached the stairhead and turned to go down.

For there, seated comfortably in a low, cane-botton chair in the hall below, was the Lombard, every line and look of him spelling out "Watchdog" in letters a foot high.

The American, pausing a moment in astonished chagrin, peered down through the cool, close-shuttered gloom of the antique stairway. Instinctively he felt a numbing check upon his plans, his hopes. And, as in a flash of inspiration, he knew that the Lombard was to be his guard lest, he, by any violence to himself or to the patriarch, put an end to Vecchio's diabolical observations, records, tabulations and cold scientific ghoulishness.

"Ah!" he breathed, bitterly, a doubled hate and rage breaking over him. "So then, this Shylock is bound to have his pound of flesh? Determined I shall drink the draft down to its lees, while he stands gloating, over me, pencil and note-book in his withered claws!"

He started down the stairs, determination bristling out all over him. But, recollecting his previous error, he stopped a moment, then forced a smile to his lips, and with an assumption of casuality inquired:

"Well, my friend, what time is it? I've been oversleeping."

Lombard looked up with a surly grimace, from the cheap "Novella" he was reading.

"Half past eleven," he answered gruffly.

"Thank you. Beautiful day for a walk, for working in the garden, isn't it?" And Dennison descended a few steps.

"Dear Uncle, with my compliments," cried the boy in a shrill, strange voice

"Go back, *m'sieur*."

"What? I'm going to take a walk."

"Go back!"

"Why, you—you—what do you mean?" exclaimed Dennison, holding back with difficulty his sudden anger in the bonds of prudence. "On whose orders?"

"His."

"You mean—I can't come down-stairs, or go out in the garden, or—or anything?" His voice broke with passion.

"I cannot talk, *m'sieur*. You must go back."

"Yes, I will!" shouted the American, red rage blinding him. "You cur! You—you sit there and order me around! I guess not!"

And he started down the stairs again, his face black with passion, fists clenched, breast heaving.

The Lombard rose to meet him.

"Go back!" he shouted angrily. Lost, now, were all the simulacre of respect; lost the "*m'sieur*." Brutal and plain the order was, as it was given by a dull, clod-like beast of a man to this highly sensitive, scholarly New Yorker. Like oil upon a blaze, it sent the madness rushing to Dennison's brain.

Where now were the American's thoughts of diplomacy, of ruse and cunning?

STUNG beyond human endurance, frantic with the culmination of all this interminable series of goading insults, abuses, and horrors, Dennison flung himself on the tormentor.

"Take that—from *me!*" he shouted, leaping down the last few steps and aiming a blow at the bull-necked brute's face.

With surprising celerity the Lombard ducked.

There came a clinch; a grunting, straining, breathless clutch and struggle. Then all at once his now-diminished strength no longer any match for the gorilla vigor of the servant, the American went down.

A second later he was lying on the tiles, with the Lombard astride his heaving chest.

His raging struggles were in vain. Calmly the huge, hulking creature held him in a grip of steel, till, quite exhausted, Dennison lay still.

Then, pulling from his pocket a long hempen cord, Lombard proceeded to trice up the victim.

Again the American fought, cursed, writhed and foamed with insane wildness. Methodically, slowly, surely, Lombard dominated him.

Presently, securely bound hand and foot, the Italian bore him off to the study.

Dennison, his pride now again reasserting itself, refrained from further speech or supplication, threats or invectives. Only, wide-eyed, panting and undone, he watched what might happen to him now.

"Let him only kill me—that is all I hope for now!" he thought, with wormwood bitterness cankering his inmost heart. "Death!" Can I not find it, soon?"

To his surprise, he saw that the inner door, leading into the laboratory, stood open, and that the vacuum-lights within were flooding the hateful place with radiance.

Acting as though under orders, and knowing just what to do, the Lombard carried the American into this place. At the further end, almost opposite the tall cabinet which masked the secret entrance to the caverns, a cage of steel had been constructed—of steel with thickly padded bars.

Some twelve feet long this was, by eight wide and seven high. The floor of it, resting directly on the tiles, seemed to be of thick oaken planking strewn with rushes. The door, armed with a formidable padlock, was ajar.

Dennison, divining the purpose of this horrible thing, went white with loathing and a helpless rage so bitter that it sickened him. But never any word escaped him.

To struggle now, he understood, meant only further humiliation and added pain.

Ceasing all resistance, he closed his eyes and let the inevitable run its course. Even after the Lombard had laid him on the rushes, cut his bonds, and, going out, securely locked the door of this degrading, frightful prison, the American made no sound, no motion.

He lay there inert, his breath choking him, his heart all but bursting with this incredible insult. And so, in silent agony, a certain time dragged by.

Then came a voice: "You see, my friend? See what you have forced me to? What I have had to do in order to preserve you from your own mad suicidal impulses? From your own self?"

Dennison, shuddering with revulsion, opened his eyes.

There stood Il Vecchio, slippered and comfortable, with fountain pen and notebook and that ever-mocking smile.

The American, burying his face among the coarse reeds, stopped both ears with his palms. Only the convulsive twitching of his body showed the agony that racked him.

Il Vecchio, smiling no more, but with a bestial glitter in his eye, wrote for a little while; then, turning away, left the laboratory.

Behind him the heavy door clanged shut. The combination-lock clicked two or three times.

Dennison was left in silence and in darkness there—in darkness to the eye, in utter darkness of soul.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOTOR AND HIS BIRTHDAY PRESENT

WINTER, the short Elysian winter of the Riviera, blended almost imperceptibly into spring; and now, had you from some secret vantage-point been watching the life that went on there in the close-walled estate on Mount St. Clair, you would have noted what seemed like a new figure in that singular household.

No longer did a tall, vigorous young man labor among the orchard trees with Il Vecchio and the Lombard, nor now with Stasia (grown strangely wan and pallid) did he walk among the rose-paths, or sit and muse with book and pipe in the moving shadows and the wavering blots of gold that wimpled through the vine leaves of the pergola.

No; quite gone was this man; vanished utterly; no longer anywhere existent. Not dead, however. Not in existence, dead or living! The strangest happening, this, ever witnessed since time began, or since man first emerged from the brute, and destiny rang up the curtain on the long, passionate, suffering drama that

through all the ages has been playing on the world-stage!

Not living and not dead, was Dennison now; Dennison as a man among other men. Yet there still lived a body which had once been his. Yes, in his place there idled listlessly about Il Vecchio's grounds a boy who appeared to be old; ten or twelve years—a lonely child, companionless, furtive, scared, and lost, with big eyes and a strange, unnatural look upon his wretched face.

Save for the color of those eyes and of his hair (though this had grown considerably lighter), and for the shape of his ears, which in a human being never change their contour from birth to death, you could not have recognized this abnormal, inverted mockery of childhood.

Yet it was Granville Dennison, the famous American physician and surgeon, who less than seven months ago had in distress and all the disability of age climbed the straight path up to Il Vecchio's solitude.

Sometimes when fiction of the wildest order passes unchallenged, when impossible lands and wild unearthly adventures find tolerant acceptance, the plain narration of a plain scientific fact, amply verified and easily susceptible of proof excites incredulous hostility.

This, I very well know, may be the case here and now. Some considerable number of otherwise intelligent persons will insist that merely because a thing is new to them, and strange, and seems to run counter to the generally accepted laws of nature, therefore it cannot be.

Yet, in despite of all such puerile reasoning, I once more state the simple fact: Seven months from the day when Dennison had robbed Il Vecchio of the Alkahest, four months from the time when he had returned from that fruitless quest to Alfort, he had diminished to a height of four feet six and one-half, and to sixty-seven pounds in weight.

And week by week, day by day, the Alkahest was still at work upon him, upon him now shorn of every aspect of revolt, seemingly dulled to a certain passive acquiescence in this life of his, apparently thinking no more of the homeland; remembering little, if anything (so Vecchio judged), of what had taken place; a curious creature, neither man nor boy, yet partaking of the nature of both.

THE MAY sun shone bright on him one morning, as, listlessly holding a red and blue box-kite in his hand, he walked down the gravel path toward the summer-house upon the cliff.

There, lying in a corner, he beheld the miscellaneous heap of trifles which Il Vecchio had at different times during the past few weeks bought for him—a dissected map of Europe, a miniature railway system with track, switches, cars and engines; a model airplane, and some few other things such as the old man, aided by Stasia's heart-sick suggestions, had provided.

At sight of them, Dennison's lip curled with deadly scorn. His indifferent eye brightened with a flash of hatred.

He flung down the kite as though it burned his touch. "Ugh!" he exclaimed.

He shoved the playthings away from him with his foot. His impulse was to stamp upon them, to dash them into bits and hurl them over the railing into the sea, far below, but he restrained it.

"No, no; I mustn't do that," he said, quite slowly. "That would never do at all. I've got to go right on pretending till—till—what? O merciful Father! *What will the end be?*

Terrified, he stared about him with wild eyes. He cringed as though from some invisible enemy.

"The Horla—that was no impossibility, after all;" he moaned.

FOR a moment he stood there immersed in sick dejection and fear. Then anger reasserted itself.

"Ugh! The fool!" he hissed. "He thinks he's going to keep me contented, this way? It's like giving a condemned murderer a cheap cigar on the morning of his execution! Oh, if it would only finish! If I didn't have to go on and on, this way—making believe!"

Then tears came to his eyes, glistening in the clear sunlight. Shuddering, he turned away.

His gaze fell on a book that lay upon the bench—an open book with an exciting picture of a balloon driving through storm-clouds over an ocean in fury.

"Jules Verne—for *me!*" he gibed, with an exceeding bitterness. "For me, for Granville Dennison, A.B., A.M., M.D.! The idiot! The driveling madman! Playthings, pocket-money—five francs a week for candy and such nonsense—knickerbockers and Jules Verne for *me!*"

Clenching his boyish fists, he stood there a moment rigid with hate and overpowering disgust. Then he fell to pacing the length of the pergola.

"Am I going mad?" he wondered. "Will that be the end? Will the Horla really catch me; must I finish in the darkness of insanity?"

Strangely irrelevant thoughts crowded in upon his feverish brain—that horrible anomaly of a brain, a man's brain in the skull of a mere boy. He recalled his offices in New York, his assistant whom he had so unceremoniously deserted, and all his patients left in the lurch by his mad flight.

Then his mother's face, long dead (he envied her!) flashed on the screen of his mental vision. Quite absurdly the next picture was an inconsequential wrangle he had once had with a French railway porter at Lyons, over an excess piece of baggage. Then came the thought of Stasia—but this he banished with a cry as of a wounded animal.

"No, no!" he whispered. "I mustn't dwell on that! For that spells madness—and I need my reason, clear and unimpeded, for the thing I yet must do. To be called back from old age to the prime of life, to love again, to find love turn to dust and ashes on my very lips—"

Fused in a glow of gold, the overarching sky flooded that summer land with wonder; but Dennison, the lad, beheld it not. No longer now could the groves, the rose-trees, the gorgeous-hued parterres, hold any charm for him.

A mere mockery had become the warmth and perfume of that delicious spot, the scent of the big purple violets along the crumbling edge of the cliff, the cuckoo-calls among the shrubbery, the bird-songs, and the wonder of the inverted bowl of sky which blended, on the far horizon, with the still deeper hues of the great inland sea.

This, the paradise of the whole world, with its unending delights for every sense and faculty, now wrought in his fear-sickened mind and in his perishing soul only revulsions nauseating by their very intensity.

"Oh—if I could only die!" he moaned. "If I only dared to end it! The noose, the bullet, the ax, the burning stake, to a being dowered with determination and the courage I have lost—how infinitely preferable! But Vecchio, that fiend incarnate, Vecchio has robbed me of my fortitude. He has taken strength. He has sapped courage. He will yet exact life. Will he take my mind, as well?"

THE WRETCH twisted his hands in a spasm of agony. He had spoken truth. Under the aged scientist's long treatment, under the torment of having seen himself periodically lessen and dwindle and grow physically weaker, his stamina had given way. He moved and lived under Il Vecchio's domination.

A vicious circle held him. So long as Vecchio lived, and willed that *he* should live, the wretch no longer dared attempt to take his life; and he lacked courage, as a house-dog even when abused utterly lacks it, to try to compass Vecchio's death.

So, wrung with constant agony, which he labored to conceal, he waited. His speculations as to the future, these constituted his supreme torture. *What would the end be?* That which, for the aged Italian, constituted the climax of a long series of intensely interesting observations, filled the boy with shuddering abomination.

Imagine a guinea-pig in a pathological laboratory endowed with human reason. Conceive this, if you will. Figure to yourself the sensations of this creature as, dumb and inhibited from resistance, it sees and feels the daily inoculation with tetanus bacillus or the virus of hydrophobia. Thus, perhaps, may you gain some insight into the maddening horror of Dennison's life during those weeks and months of captivity on Mount St. Clair.

That he, alone of all the fifteen hundred million human beings on earth, should have been ordained for such a fate, filled him with savage rage. The thought of shrinking into a child and thence passing to the state of helpless infancy, borne in a nurse's arms, drove him half mad.

Worst of all was the thought which constantly recurred:

"Must my mind, too, eventually give way, and shrink and weaken with my body? Or shall I, as a crawling baby, still possess all the acumen, knowledge, and intellectual power of a full-grown man?"

The horror of this situation preyed upon him night and day. Robust in body, fatally healthy through the workings of that damnable Alkahest, yet his face—

boyish though it now had grown—reflected, when he was alone, the more than infernal torments of his mind.

This train of thought now recurred to him as he paced the summer-house.

"Can't I analyze this horror?" he exclaimed, stopping a moment to compose his mind. "Here is the situation. So far, I find no diminution in the acuteness of my mental processes. My psychological loss, so far, has all taken place in the domain of the will, not in that of the reason.

"All my stores of knowledge and experience, my linguistics—in spite of Vecchio's efforts—my apperceptions, and my logical faculties seem untouched. The brain-centers localizing all my special fields of study seem to have escaped the process of rejuvenescence. But from now on, what? With the next periodic crisis, what then? Ah, that I do not know!

"All I know is that at some time, some epoch of this involution, a change must come! A change—an ending!"

Again he continued his agitated walking up and down the pergola. Bitterly he thought of Vecchio's attempts to weaken his intellect—of the campaign to make him forget English and even his own name (a campaign he had fought against by talking out loud in English when alone).

Of the efforts to interest him in toys and petty things; to deprive him of adult books and put juvenile fiction only into his hands; of the ponycart Vecchio had bought him; of the little room, small bed, and childish surroundings furnished for him; of a thousand and one artfully conceived devices for his mental extinction.

And, in spite of all his pain, he smiled a bitter smile.

"Yes," he said, "and I have met him more than half-way, all this time. No use to resist. Better submit, until perhaps—perhaps something may happen yet to free me? Vecchio believes even now that it was he who thought of all these things.

"He does not know the sly mental suggestions, slid imperceptibly into his senile brain, that led up to his providing that pony and that room, that brought this toy railway, and this kite to me! Ah, the secret, hidden battle of brain and brain! The conflict not yet ended!"

He paused, sighed deeply, and walked over to the rail, sheer above that thousand-foot drop.

HE PEERED down with anxious, envious eyes.

"If I but dared!" he whispered.

For a moment, holding on with both his boyish hands, he felt a certain dizziness. Incredible now it seemed to him that he had ever scrambled down a narrow, broken pathway along that cliff, half unreal that incident had now become, as had the finding of the caves, the death-chamber, and the eighteen coffins. Was all that a dream?

Dennison felt in his pocket, where lay a little box. Inside that box, he knew—a box which Vecchio thought contained but pebbles and childish trifles—inside it reposed the metal tags he had pried off three of those very caskets. Yet, in spite of all that he could not make the thing seem real.

Again he gazed far down. Crawling, the surf creamed idly along the base of the cliff. He could see the-up-shoot of the spray; could see it fling back and out into the receding billows with a hissing echo. The suspiration of the sea, hardly perceptible out from shore, kept this eternal torment of brine lashing at the volcanic rocks.

"A thousand feet?" he mused. "Higher than the Eiffel Tower—I'd never know when I struck the water. It would all be over before that.

"There'd be no pain; only perhaps, a stifling, choking sensation—just a whirling over and over, an inability to breathe—a mad, wild, fruitless fight—then unconsciousness and—the end of everything! In less than seven seconds it would be all over. Seven seconds!"

He drew out his watch, almost the only relic of his manhood which Il Vecchio had left to him, and looked at it. Yes, he had calculated correctly. He ran over the computation in his head, the formula for falling bodies: Sixteen and a half feet the first second, thirty-three the second, and so on. Seven seconds!

On the dial of his watch he observed the little needle twitch. He counted off the time—how brief! In the space of ten heart-beats, once he dared take that leap, everything would cease to be, for him—forever and forever, without end.

Yet he shrank back. Old Vecchio judged right well in feeling how far

gone was this victim's courage. Vampirelike the patriarch had sapped and undermined it. The boy-man, terrified even at the thought of such a deed, cringed from the railing.

He smiled weakly. Then, eager to divert his tortured mind from these horrible thoughts, he looked about him.

"Ah! Now, I know what to do!" he exclaimed, with pitiable relief.

HE PEERED through the vines. Nobody was near; nobody was taking any notice of him. His face grew crafty, keen, and alert.

He fell down on his knees; and, groping under the seat, found in a secret hiding-place a thin, brown-covered volume. This book was stamped: "Italian at a Glance."

It summed up the change that had taken place in him. Where a man would have been plotting murder, this boy-creature was devising futilities.

For he sat down with the book, quickly found a marked place, and began to study. He mumbled words and phrases to himself. Line by line, rule by rule, Dennison devoured a chapter of irregular verbs. His lips moved rapidly. A fever for learning possessed him.

At last he paused, shut the book and looked up with a puerile expression of guile.

"Eleven lessons, so far," he said. "When I've done twenty-five, I know I can catch at least the drift of what he and Lombard say to each other. Two weeks more of this, with my Latin and French to help me, and they can't talk about *me* without my knowing it!"

Again he applied himself to the book. Again his lips moved with the intricacies of "Verbs of the Third Class."

But all at once, down from the house there rang a cry, a hail:

"Totor! To-*tor!*"

At sound of this hateful summons, this degrading boy-name for "Victor" with which Il Vecchio had christened him in trying to obliterate the American personality, Dennison's face grew savage. The hate and loathing that sought to find expression through those childish features made a picture which, once seen, could never be forgotten.

Again the shout, in the old man's voice: *"To-tor!"*

"Coming, uncle!" cried Dennison, as he had been taught by lessons none too mild. And, hastily hiding his Italian grammar, he picked up the box-kite and hurried with it from the summer-house.

Il Vecchio met him, part way down the gravel walk among the roses.

"Come, my nephew," he said in French, smiling with an assumption of paternal affection. "The pony is waiting. Time, now, for your drive with Aunt Stasia."

"Yes, uncle," answered the lad, in the same tongue. He didn't raise his eyes from the ground, but stood there like a dog that fears its master's gaze.

"Here is a louis d'or for you," continued the old man, pulling out his purse. "This is your birthday, to-day. Do you not remember?"

"Remember?" said Dennison vaguely. "Remember what? What do you mean?"

"Never mind," parried Il Vecchio, with a smile of secret satisfaction. "Do not bother about—about the past. We will care for you. Everything you wish, you shall have. Tell me, my dear nephew, are you happy here?"

"Yes, uncle," answered the child, still keeping his eyes upon the pebbles at his feet. "But—"

"But what?"

"Sometimes I am lonesome. I—I have no other boy to play with, and—"

"I understand. Very well; we will attend to that. To-morrow you shall have a boy. The Lombard has a nephew in Cette. Just as you are my nephew, that boy is his. I think he is about your age. I will ask him this boy's name and where he lives. Then perhaps you can bring him back with you, when you and auntie come home this afternoon. Would you like that?"

"Yes, my uncle."

"Good! We'll have you quite yourself, before long. You've been very ill, you know, as I've already told you. But soon, with little companions to play with, and lots of fresh air, and all that, you'll be the happiest lad in France! Well, here now, take this louis d'or. It is all yours to spend as you see fit."

Dennison extended a hand for the hateful coin. He longed to seize it and dash it to the ground, or, better still, fling it in Vecchio's mocking, wrinkled, hypocritical face; but he restrained himself.

For, whence it had come he knew not, a sudden idea had been born in his anguished brain. A new thought, a hope, a desire so keen and trembling. But still,

with lowered head, he veiled himself from the old man's piercing scrutiny.

He took the gold-piece.

"Thank you, *mon oncle,*" said he. "You are very, very kind to me."

"Ah! Glad to hear you say that! Glad you are duly grateful, my nephew. But now tell me, what will you buy with so much money?"

"Can—can I have anything I want, for—my birthday present?" faltered the child, his face going singularly pale.

"Anything, in reason."

"Well, then, I'd—I'd like—"

"Yes? What?"

"You know that history-book you gave me, a little while ago? The one with William Tell in it?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Oh, I—I wish I could have a little bow and some arrows, like that, uncle, and play William Tell!"

Il Vecchio laughed heartily. How this amused him, to see the one-time strong and lusty American doctor, the man who had robbed him of his Alkahest, now stand cringing there before him in the sunlight, clutching a louis in his little hand and falteringly beg for a toy bow and arrows so that he might play William Tell! The old man's heart swelled with pride in his experiment, and with another even sweeter sentiment,—revenge!

And, patting the lad upon his shoulder, with a simulation of great affection, he replied:

"So then, my little Totor wants to be William Tell, does he? Well, that's no very unreasonable desire. It's easy to accomplish—just to imitate a myth!"

"You—you mean—I can have it?"

"Of course! Of course you can! There, there, now, run along. See the Lombard has got the pony harnessed. Auntie is waiting. I'll find out about that little boy to play with you. And tomorrow you and he can play Tell to your heart's desire. But mind, my nephew—blunt arrows! Don't forget!"

"I won't, dear uncle," answered the child, climbing into the wicker pony-cart, where Stasia sat very pale and quiet. He tried to smile, but had Il Vecchio known what lay beneath that mockery of joy, his own amusement would have turned to Dead Sea Fruit and horror.

CHAPTER XXIV

SECRET LABORS, AND A STROLL

WITH the old man's golden louis, "Totor" bought, in a toy-shop on the Rue de l'Hospice, a stout bow of ash, and twelve arrows.

The bow was more than a full meter long, and capable of throwing a shaft easily two hundred yards or more. The arrows, blunted into flat heads, measured about two feet six inches in length. They were gaily feathered with red, blue and green. A quiver completed the outfit, and a red leather belt with a brass buckle to strap it round the waist. There never was a prettier toy.

In the days following, now accompanied by Jean-Paul Beziers, the nephew of the Lombard, now quite alone, the child assiduously practised archery. Neglected were the miniature railway and the box-kite, quite cast aside the other trifles. Even the secret study of the Italian grammar was forgotten. You never saw a boy so utterly absorbed in a new sport as Totor in this marksmanship of his.

William Tell was acted and reacted scores of times. Every tree and bush on

Bowling — or Biking

the estate had to serve as a target. The lad also drew rings on the blind wall at the rear of the pony-shed, and there, for hours at a time, he would stand, gradually increasing his distance till finally at fifty yards he could invariably put every one of the dozen arrows inside at least the two central rings.

He caught the vibration and the set of the bow to perfection, and came to know each individual arrow and what it would do, how to allow for wind, calculate distance and judge heights. The apparatus, in fine, seemed to become almost a part of him, an extension of his own bodily members, with which to do his will.

Thus two weeks passed. And Il Vecchio, pleased by the success of his gift, by its extraordinary efficacy in diverting the child's mind and in making him forget still more completely, it seemed, whatever faint vestigia of the one-time past life remained to him, Il Vecchio, I say, smiled very sagely.

Sometimes he would even lean upon his spade, of a sunny morning, and watch the lad's exploits, or go out with him to the target or the pony-shed and there for a quarter of an hour observe this childish pleasure and enthusiasm—making, the while, a note or two.

A few times he even patted "Totor" on the head, with words of praise. Once, after an especially creditable score, he remarked:

"You are a brave *garçon*, my lad! When you grow up," and now his intonation became peculiar, "I know you surely will carry off the Grand Prix of the National Toxophilite Society. Stick to your exercise, Totor. It will keep you strong and well; you need something of this sort to help you, for, remember, you have had brain fever here."

Dennison smiled that shy, elusive smile of his. Entering archery competition was perhaps the last thing in his mind; the idea did not inspire him particularly.

"I'll practise, my uncle," answered he. "I love it! And do you think I shall some time make a record score?"

"No doubt of it!" exclaimed the patriarch. "No doubt of it at all! Remember, practise makes perfect." With which salutary motto he returned to his digging and his delving in the garden.

"Totor" wistfully fondled his bow with an affection touching in its evident simplicity.

ANOTHER of those strange, periodic illnesses of his—which Vecchio called relapses of the brain fever—confined him for a few days within doors.

When little Jean-Paul came eagerly seeking this new playmate of his, who lived in the big house and had such an amazing plethora of toys, the Lombard gruffly informed him that his playmate was sick and would not be able to see him for a long, long time.

Jean-Paul cried, in spite of the box-kite that Vecchio gave him, and went away down the mountain again, to his own mean hovel on the Rue Louis Blanc. Never again was he allowed to visit Mount St. Clair.

For, had he done so he must inevitably have carried with him so strange a story that it would either have got him a beating for falsehood, or else have raised endless discussions through all the town, concerning Il Vecchio's domain up there on the height.

The little ragged fellow would have told, with fear, that Master "Totor" now no longer seemed a boy of ten or twelve, about his own age, though rather larger. No, he would have said the old man's nephew had in some strange, mysterious manner, changed; that now he had grown smaller, lighter, younger in every way; that now he seemed no more than a mere child of eight.

Such a story nobody could have believed; yet it would have been true in every word. For when again the wretched "Totor" emerged from the house and once more showed himself, the change which had taken place in him was evident at a glance.

Il Vecchio, sitting with book and cigar upon the broad, seaward-looking piazza, observed him with tremendous satisfaction.

"See, Stasia," he murmured to his niece, who sat in a big wicker-chair close by, listlessly working at some raffia in which she took no interest whatsoever. "You see, he has quite forgotten. Nothing remains now of his past. I count on you, on you who never yet have disobeyed me, to maintain the illusion. Ah! the admirable effects of science!"

The girl did not answer, nor did she even lift her eyes, which seemed red as with secret weeping, ringed with dark circles as with sleepless nights. Il Vecchio, however, saw nothing of this. His gaze, eager and vulpine, was fixed upon

his victim, who now—faithful to his new toy in spite of his recent loss of strength—had begun his archery practice once again.

"You see—" began Il Vecchio. But Stasia, arising suddenly, disappeared into the house. Her fancywork, unheeded, lay on the porch floor.

The old man frowned and stroked his beard.

"So?" he muttered. "Well—we shall see! We shall see—and soon!"

For some days, life went on quietly. Vecchio worked among his trees, read, studied, made notes and many a long entry in his black-bound record-book. Lombard seemed to be blind. He said nothing; he obeyed, as always. Stasia kept much to her own room.

As for the little boy, he played.

But, though the patriarch kept close watch on him, something was slowly and surely going forward which Il Vecchio had no faintest notion of.

It was this: The lad for some time had been saving wire nails of various descriptions and of different sizes. Every nail he could come across, in secret, he hid under a flat rock down behind the thick clump of sumacs at the lower end of the estate.

When he had got together a dozen large nails, he began filing them to needle-points. This, for his little hands, was a terrible task. Yet he kept at it, using a rusty old file he had abstracted from the pony-shed and stealing now half an hour, now fifteen minutes or even less.

With indefatigable perseverance, he succeeded after a week or so in reducing all his nails to formidable acuteness, and in filing off the heads. He now had in his possession, hidden under the rock, twelve steel points ranging from an inch and a half to three inches in length.

The next stage was even more difficult, for absolute secrecy had to be observed. How to barb his arrows without being caught at it caused him prolonged speculation. But at last he hit upon a way.

ON THE tenth day since his last periodic diminution, he took a childish fancy to play at fishing off the cliff. With a long pole and a reel of fishline begged from Uncle Vecchio, he sat for an hour in the summer-house, whipping the empty air over the abyss and pretending to haul up an innumerable catch. Vecchio smiled at this innocent amusement.

"So then," he reflected, "his mind *is* dwindling, with his body. This point I have not yet been positive about. There may have been some auto-suggestive deception about it, so far. But now, with the marked growth of his imaginative faculty, the matter is adequately proved." And he went off to make an extended entry in his records.

"Totor" returned the fish-line to uncle, that evening; but not intact. No; with his pocket-knife he had cut off about fifteen feet. By winding the line on the spool again, this loss was not apparent. The fifteen feet of strong silk cord "Totor" very carefully hid behind a picture in his little room.

That night he took his bow, arrows, and quiver to bed with him, as children often will some very favorite toy. The old man observed this, too, with sovereign pleasure. Rubbing his veiny hands together, he pondered: "Better and better! Soon, now, childhood will be past. Soon infancy will draw near. And then—then! Ah! The great mystery, the riddle, the supreme question of this whole life-long investigation will be answered! Soon, *soon!*"

So excited did this thought render him, that until long past midnight he sat smoking in his study, pondering on life and death, the human soul, identity, personality, and all the master problems that, ever since man left off his simian guise, have baffled human reason.

"Totor," all this time, was very busy. If Vecchio thought him asleep in his little bed, with the beloved playthings clasped in his childish arms, never had he made a more serious error.

For, laboring in the dark, working as fast as his little trembling hands could serve him, the child was busy with his arrows.

With his knife he first cut down the blunt portion of the head of each. From moment to moment he listened, ready at any sign of alarm to creep into bed, toys and all, and cover up under uncle's blanket. But alarm there was none. So on and on he toiled, by the sense of touch. And after a certain time he had reduced all his arrows to the desired form.

With minute care he gathered up all the shavings. These he hid beneath his mattress.

He next addressed himself to the task of pointing the shafts.

Cutting notches, he lashed the steel points securely with the fish-line. Midnight was past and gone when the last arrow had received its tip. But the child felt no exhaustion. Instead, a wild joy filled him, an elation, a burning eagerness.

"Oh, if it were only morning, now!" he whispered, as he replaced the arrows, points downward, in his quiver, and got into bed with it.

All night long he never closed his eyes. Staring up in the dark, he thought, he planned, lived in anticipation the awful pleasures of the morrow.

Day broke at length, calm, golden-bright and fair, a perfect day in that most perfect spot on earth.

TOWARD eleven o'clock, when Mariannella was busy in the kitchen, Lombard gone down to Cette with Stasia in the dog-car to see about a consignment of mulberry-cuttings just arrived, and Vecchio on the point of finishing his daily outdoor task, "Totor" appeared in the garden.

Round his waist was strapped the quiver, very brave with its brass buckle and red leather belt. The child gripped the ashen bow in his hand. Though pale, he was smiling and seemed of good cheer as he stepped out into the sunlight.

Vecchio greeted him.

"Well now, my little man," he said, setting aside his mattock, "and what are we about, this morning? Still playing William Tell?"

"No, uncle, I'm tired of that, now."

"Tired of it? No wonder. Even the nicest game grows wearisome, after a while." He wiped his high, bald forehead, and for a moment stood looking down with calculating eyes at this strange little creature before him.

Silence, a few seconds. Then the child said:

"Uncle?"

"Well, Totor?"

"Is there anything outside the wall, over there?" He pointed to westward.

Vecchio laughed. "Of course!" he said, marveling the while at Totor's fast-increasing simplicity.

"But, uncle, Jean-Paul said that was the end of the world, over beyond that wall. He—he said if anybody went over there, they'd fall off into—into nothing!"

The old man stared.

"Come, come!" he answered. "Jean-Paul's a naughty boy. He was only trying to fool my little Totor! He told a wicked lie."

"Totor looked up shyly.

"I'd like to see, uncle," he begged. "Please show me?"

"Why, lad, there's only a stretch of forest over beyond there. Woods, that's all, gradually sloping down to the Etang de Thau. Jean-Paul knows that, quite well."

"Won't you take me there, please, uncle? Jean-Paul's uncle takes *him* for a walk, sometimes. And you never take me! I'd like to take a walk there with you. Maybe there might be bears or wolves or something to shoot?"

Again Vecchio laughed heartily, his wrinkled old face breaking into a thousand parchment creases at the thought of wild game in that country. But "Totor" would not yield.

"Please! *Please!*" he entreated, in childish trebles.

At last the patriarch yielded. Less for the sake of amusing this victim, it was, than for the chance of studying the child-psychology, of observing the workings of this mind reduced—as he believed—from virile strength to the impotence of almost infancy.

"All right, Totor," he agreed. "Just let me get my big straw hat and my pipe; then we'll start. But I can't go very far, you understand. Or for very long. Uncle's busy. Half an hour's all the time uncle can give to Totor. Will that be enough?"

"Yes, uncle. Oh, that will be enough. More than enough for me."

"Unless we meet big game!" the old man gibed, starting slowly for the house.

"Do you think we shall?" questioned the child wonderingly. "I—I can shoot a lot in half an hour!"

Confidingly he slid his little hand in Vecchio's lean, wasted hand.

Together, child and patriarch, they walked up the long graveled pathway.

CHAPTER XXV

NEMESIS

SOME fifteen minutes later, having traversed the grounds to westward and made their way through a long-disused

wicket gate that communicated with the woodland on the far flank of the mountain, the strange pair were strolling among the planes and beeches and tall, swaying pines that clothed the slope.

The shade was cool and refreshing. Among the wind-swayed branches the clear sunlight fell in a million moving patterns on the leaf-mold and the fine, sparse forest-grass. Far off to left, over a tiny ridge, flashed a bright sparkle from the sea. Thrush and mavis, unseen amid the foliage, gossiped the news of the dim aisles. Peaceful beyond all telling, beautiful, and overhung with mystery, the forest stretched away.

A while, they walked in silence. From time to time the old man glanced down at Totor, keenly observing him with a sort of grim exultation on his aged face. Totor, looking about with wonder, seemed to perceive nothing of this. He was thinking of big game.

At last the child spoke.

"Uncle," he asked, "who am I?" How did I get here? Why haven't I got any father or mother, the same as Jean-Paul?"

Vecchio frowned. He had hoped all such speculations were already forgotten. But clearly no choice existed save to answer these childish seekings after truth. So he said:

"Who are you, Totor? Why, you're my little nephew, of course. You know that well. Your father and mother both died, in Marseilles, when you were only a baby. I adopted you; I, your great-uncle. Don't bother about such things. Are you not happy here with me?

"Y-yes," the child answered vaguely. "But I don't seem to remember—"

"Look!" interrupted the old man, pointing. At all hazards he must break this dangerous train of thought. "See that beautiful bird—ah!—catch that flicker of red wings through the leaves? See it?"

Totor looked.

"Yes, uncle," he said. "It looks just like blood, doesn't it?"

For a while no word passed. But Vecchio stroked his beard with a troubled air.

Now they have come to a sort of clearing on the western slope of the height. Here the grass grew taller, and among it a crimson blossom or two swayed in the breeze.

"This is far enough, Totor," the patriarch remarked, stopping at the edge of the cleared space. "We must go back now. You see, Jean-Paul was telling a naughty story. This isn't the end of the world, here; not at all. But come, come. Now we must turn around."

"All right, uncle. But won't you wait just a minute, please? I want to get that flower—see? The big red one over there!"

Vecchio released his hand, then stood watching him as the little figure advanced toward the middle of the clearing. But to his surprise Totor did not pick the blossom.

Instead he drew an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to the bow-string. Vecchio seemed to catch a glint of metal. A formless wonder filled his mind—the vague adumbration of a nameless something, he knew not what—a premonition of some strange, unreal, incredible happening.

"Totor! Come back!" he called sharply. "Come back to me, this instant!"

INSTEAD of answering, the child wheeled on him at a distance of some fifteen yards.

Up came the bow. Vecchio, his eyes widening with a pang of sudden fear, saw a steel-tipped arrow leveled at him.

"*Totor!*" he shouted, taking one forward step. Menacingly he raised his fist.

"Dear uncle, with my compliments!" cried the boy in a shrill, strange voice. Then, before Vecchio could move from his frozen attitude of terror, the arm drew back. The string grew taut.

Zing-g-g-g!

The cord hummed low. Like a flick of light the shaft sped true.

Vecchio flung up his arms. His wild shout died in a bubbling gasp. Fair in the throat the steel had struck him; and now a gush of blood along his neck, a frothy foam of crimson on his lips—a foam that tinged his patriarchal beard—bespoke the horrible wound.

Clutching at the air, he staggered back. He caught a pine-trunk and stood leaning there against it, fighting to speak, struggling in vain to voice some word, some futile threat or prayer.

Dennison, meanwhile, with calm deliberation had drawn out another arrow from the quiver, and once again had laid it on the buckskin cord.

"I think," he said, "that you have told your last lie to me, dear 'uncle.' As a matter of fact, I know very well who I

am. My name is Granville Dennison, M. D., and every event since I came here is quite clearly fixed in my mind. Furthermore, let me say you are mistaken about this not being the end of the world. It *is*—for you. Here—this will bring the end a little nearer!"

Again the hum, the dart of steel.

A moan broke from the wordless lips of Vecchio. He sank down, his back still supported by the bole of the big pine. His big straw hat fell off. Deep through his right shoulder the arrow had sped. Its gaily feathered butt quivered in the sunlight.

"Yes, a good shot. I aimed at the notch in your lapel," remarked Dennison with composure. "At this distance, I simply couldn't miss, you see. I like to observe results. Like you, I have a scientific turn of mind. You have observed my symptons; now I watch yours. Fair, eh? Here goes another!"

The third struck the already dying man in the left breast. He struggled for a moment trying to stagger toward Dennison but a quick, stunning shot that ripped his scalp sent him down in a crumpled heap among the tall and nodding grasses.

"Four, so far," said Dennison. "That leaves eight, doesn't it?" His voice grew quiet, coldly taut as wire.

"Eight more—if you last that long. Please sit up, dear uncle. As you are, I can't do myself credit. You make a wretched target, that way!" He waited.

Vecchio, writhing, held up a withered hand for mercy.

On the instant, Dennison shot again. The hand fell, transfixed by a feathered shaft.

"Five! And not one miss, so far. See the advantage of long practice? Really, I must thank you for your birthday gift to me. A splendid gift—none better!"

But now the scientist, wounded to death, lay motionless and bleeding in the grass. With an expectant air, mingled with impatience, Dennison waited.

"What, so soon?" he asked. "Why, this will never do! You kept me six or seven months in torture. And shall I pay you off with fewer minutes? Come, come, uncle; get up! Give me my due!"

No motion, no sign of further struggle.

Dennison, with an exclamation of annoyance, walked up to the prone figure. He tried to stir it with his foot. But in vain.

There lay the patriarch sprawling on his back, all maculate with crimson stains, and hardly breathing. The bubbling respiration came through the lips in quick, short gasps. Only the glitter of the sunken eyes revealed the tenacious life that still held and throbbed and would not yet depart.

"Not all your science, not all your superhuman knowledge helps you now," said the child. "You lie there on a par with the most ignorant peasant on his death-bed. Listen! Listen and hear me! You are still conscious, though you cannot speak. Dumb, helpless, dying, you can still hear and understand for a few minutes yet."

HE PAUSED, reflectively contemplating the wretch at his feet, then slowly continued.

"Old man, in your unnatural, hideous experiments, your seekings after the forbidden and the unknowable, you have violated laws of man and laws of nature, both alike.

"Murder by wholesale has been as nothing in your sight. That you might drag the inmost secrets of life from their mysterious hiding-place and fabricate your devilish Alkahest, you have used men, women, children, without pity, as so much raw material. Their blood and lives and breath, and all their pain and fear have been nothing to you—nothing save so many ingredients to compound your master-crime, the crowing infamy of the whole world!

"Coldly you have kept records of your revolting crimes—records! Yes, yes; I know, I understand! Even though your cursed hieroglyphics have escaped my deciphering, yet I have plumbed their meaning. The ravaged corpses, all ticketed and labeled like so many specimens in a museum, you have preserved. Kept where, in your madness, you believed no one could ever find them. But I—*I* found them, and I know! See! Look at these, old man!"

He drew from his pocket the little box wherein for so long he had secreted the metal coffin-tags pried from the caskets in the cave.

He opened this box. Before the glazing eyes of the dying patriarch he held them up. "Look!" he cried. "Your sins have found you out!"

Even in the approaching agony of death, Il Vecchio understood. His eyes

grew staring. He struggled to rise. With a last up-flare of strength he raised himself to a lolling posture. His pierced hand supported him; the other, trembling horribly, he stretched out as though to implore silence.

Dennison only smiled. He slid the damning tags back into his pocket.

"So then, you see that I know all," he sneered. "And furthermore, I judge you justly. The wrong I did you *was* no wrong—to rob you of the fruits of vampirism and of impious murder! Yet, even had it been a wrong, I have already paid in full. Paid to the final drop of woe!

"Now, Vecchio, your time is close at hand; the time to settle all accounts, to pay your all to inadequate total of possession for the horrors you have wrought. You are delivered into my hands. You transformed my body into a child's; but my brain, my intellect you could not change, you could not conquer. Have I not acted my part well? Say, have I not duped you richly, dear old Uncle Vecchio?"

The aged man struggled vainly to bring words to utterance. Only a croaking gasp escaped him. Dennison laughed outright.

"Well spoken!" he cried. "How eloquent you have become! Admirable, indeed! I would to God that all your murdered victims could hear and see you now!

"Listen; I am soon at an end of speech. Nothing has ever counted with you, save your infernal research and your damnable records. Nothing has ever restrained you, nothing been sacred. For your elixir and for the sake of observing its effect on me, you offered up the life and love and happiness of a good pure, unsullied girl. You wrecked and tortured your own niece—Stasia—the woman I adored. You gave her love, only to snatch it from her; and why? Experiments!

"You played with life, with all the inmost sacred passions of two human beings. Experiments! Of that girl you made a plaything, a mere trifling toy. Of me, the same. Experiments!

"Nothing was holy, to you. All things were toys, even the immutable laws of nature and the universe. So now, I experiment with *you*, Vecchio; so now by my hand you perish and are damned, through the mediumship of a mere childish toy."

He stepped back; and now, one by one, drove the keen barbs into that convulsive, quivering body.

Even after Il Vecchio had fallen back and lay immobile, he kept shooting. Pale and set, Dennison's face mirrored the burning soul within him—the soul of a man, there in a child's little body. And on his lips there played a smile.

The last arrow, a plunging shot, pierced Il Vecchio's lagging heart.

With one final look at the white, blood-dappled face, one scornful, curious glance at the filmed eyes that—their lids still open—stared up sightlessly into the depths of summer sky and fleecy cloud above the mountain, Dennison turned away.

He patted the ashen bow and kissed it fondly.

"Well done," he said, and dropped it in the grass. Laughing, he unbuckled the belt and let the quiver fall.

"Almost finished now," he added. "The end—and peace—are almost with me."

Then, with no further look at the strange object lying there so grim and quiet in that sunlit woodland place, he turned and made his way back toward the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

"IT IS FINISHED"

HE REACHED it, unobserved by Marianella, who alone was there. Quietly, without hesitation, acting as he had long planned, he entered the study.

He took from the book-shelf the black-bound volume of records. On the table lay a sheaf of loose notes. These, too, he gathered up.

He threw all of them together, notes and volume, into the grate. Over them he emptied the oil from the student-lamp. A moment later he had set a match to them; and, roaring, all those results of many years' unholy work were perishing.

Thoughtfully, he watched until the red, winking sparks had begun to crawl among the crinkled wreckage. Then he turned to the table. He sat down there. He penned words of explanation, of farewell and benediction, for Stasia. This note he sealed and left, inscribed with her name, conspicuously in view.

"Consumatum est!" he whispered, quoting those tremendous words with reverent emotion. "It is finished!"

He kissed the note.

"Farewell!" he said.

Then, quietly, with a strange dignity for so grotesque a little figure, he left the house. He walked down the long path among the roses toward the pergola.

He stopped only once, at a rose-tree where—that first evening of their acknowledged love—Stasia and he had kissed and said good night.

Blood-red those roses were: wounds of ardent color among the dark green foliage.

He picked one rose. He set it to his lips. Then, holding it in his hand, he went on down the path.

He turned aside, to the unguarded brink of the precipice. Smiling, and with no backward glance, he stood there a moment.

Only a moment. Then he leaped. The sea, that primal mother of all life, received him gladly to her everlasting peace.

TO-DAY, no voice is heard within the walled estate on Mount St. Clair. Deserted, falling into wildness, the orange-groves and olives struggle with encroaching pines. Weeds choke the marigolds and roses. Grass pushes up in tufts along the pathways and even has found root among the stone steps leading to the broad, rotting piazza.

The old house stands deserted, cursed with traditions of ghostly habitation, untenanted, feared through the countryside. Its tall chimney-stacks are falling into ruin; from its walls, flaked off by the eager fingering of untrimmed ivy, the stucco drops in ugly and uneven patches. Over the crumbling beams of the pergola riot wild masses of wisteria. Nature resumes her reign of beauty over all, hiding man's handiwork, softening the wreck of many things that might have been and were not.

In Tarascon, sheltered with kindly, simple relatives who pity but who do not understand, there still lives a gray-haired, bent and broken woman. Stasia, they call her. Still in her vacant face, from which the light of reason and of soul have forever faded, linger faint traces of a one-time beauty.

She never speaks, unless the kinsfolk first address her. Living, yet dead, harmless, already senile, she sits all day long in idleness at her broad window, watching the shadows creep along the walls of the Château de Rene peering across to Beaucaire, or gazing at the slow dark current of the Rhone which forever and eternally bears down long lines of foam toward the great inland sea.

And still, along the cliffs below the mountain, there at Cette, the surf breaks in silver spray by moonlight, while in the tangled groves, above, the nightingale pleads with clear-throated ecstasies of song for surcease from her passion and her pain.

Sea, earth and sky, and the dim wooded heights, the rugged precipice, the ruined walls, the innumerable voices of the nightwind all, all are questioning.

But what they ask, or what the answer that they quest, no mind shall understand, nor any human tongue dare ever speak.

The End

Into The Infinite

By Austin Hall

TO The Editors:

Some months ago you published in your magazine a story called "The Rebel Soul." This tale I related to Mr. Hall one night years ago in a restaurant on B street. And now I am sending to you the real essential part of the story.

It is not a sequel. It is really the main part of the tale. It is complete in itself. The characters have been brought forward, and the strange events related by myself just as they happened. But in no way does it lean on the other. I am saying this so that those who have not read "The Rebel Soul" may read it without feeling that they are engaging in a tale that is continued.

And a word by the way of introduction:

The George Witherspoon of "The Rebel Soul" is not impossible. Those who read the first story will remember that he stole my body; that by some mysterious means our spirits had become transplanted, and that our corporeal beings each became the habitation of the other. In other words, to all outward appearance I became George Witherspoon and he became Walter Warren. It was a metamorphosis of the impossible.

They say that a fair exchange is no robbery. Which may be so. And had it been fair I would never, perhaps, have had occasion to relate "The Rebel Soul." It is the evil of George Witherspoon that led to the story.

He was evil; so evil that there was none on earth beside him. He was wickedness itself; and rampant, he was unrepentant. He ruined my body, in his dissipations, and when he was ready, returned it again to my keeping. And departed.

But there is one thing which it is well to remember. He had not always been wicked. In his youth and boyhood he had been good; his evil was not natural. I had always thought, even when in the depths, that there was some power, some genius that we could not understand, working with George Witherspoon. He was too much like a creation. There was ever that about him of a Faust *or* Frankenstein, *or perhaps a* Mephisto. *He was too uncanny to be merely human; too much like a spirit.*

Happily I was mistaken. He was not impossible. The whole explanation, now that it is come, gives us something to live for. No man can read of George Witherspoon without an exhilarated pride in his own manhood. He who was all evil was all good. It is a strange story. But it gives us something to strive for—and a future.

Very truly yours,

Walter Warren.

The above interesting letter served as the prologue to this story when it was first published.
Part one begins on the following page.

Copyright 1919 by The Frank A. Munsey Company. This story was published serially in All-Story Weekly, beginning April 12th, 1919 issue

WHEN my father died he left me naturally, as his only heir, his fortune. I was sick of the law and of my practice, and as my instinct and interest was in finance, I took over the bank that had been my father's. I will say right now that I was a good banker. I was naturally conservative; all the traits that I had acquired from my paternal side made me so; but I had also from my mother's side that poetry and lightness and imagination which is such an incentive to seeing things ahead and for construction. The two qualities added together made for progress, which indeed, in real substance, is but a welding of sane conservatism to a far-seeing imagination. Without the welding, the one quality makes the miser; the other the poet.

I was successful. I made money and cherished my family. In my way, for I confess that I was not the head of a great institution, I was very fortunate. My ventures turned out happily, I will not say luckily, for that, you know, is a gambler's term and does not apply to bankers, who just speculate or invest. I was the financial arm of several new industries which redounded to the credit of our little city, and which instilled in it a new vigor and virility that threatened a doubled census and a classification with the towns of some importance. Naturally I was respected. Whatever stain had been upon the name of Warren had been erased. At least I felt so.

Occasionally the Master would come over from the city for the weekend. At first his visits had been far between; but as our acquaintance grew stronger and he understood the strange melancholy under which I sometimes labored they grew more frequent. To me he had become almost as one of flesh and blood. I ever looked upon him as a father, as protector, as a sort of benevolent spirit that fate had given me to guide me through the darkness. Which indeed he was, as I never knew the time, when I felt I needed him, that he did not come to cheer me.

It was in October, the month of fallen leaves, of sudden gusts of wind and frost-bitten gardens. The feathered lines of the storms of autumn were racing northward; we had had a light rain and the indications of the heavy storms that were sure to follow were growing thicker. The day was growing to a close; from the windows of the bank, looking up the vista of the open street that gave a narrow glimpse of the hills beyond the city, I could see the shadow of the earth's rim climbing slowly up the heights. How short the days were growing!

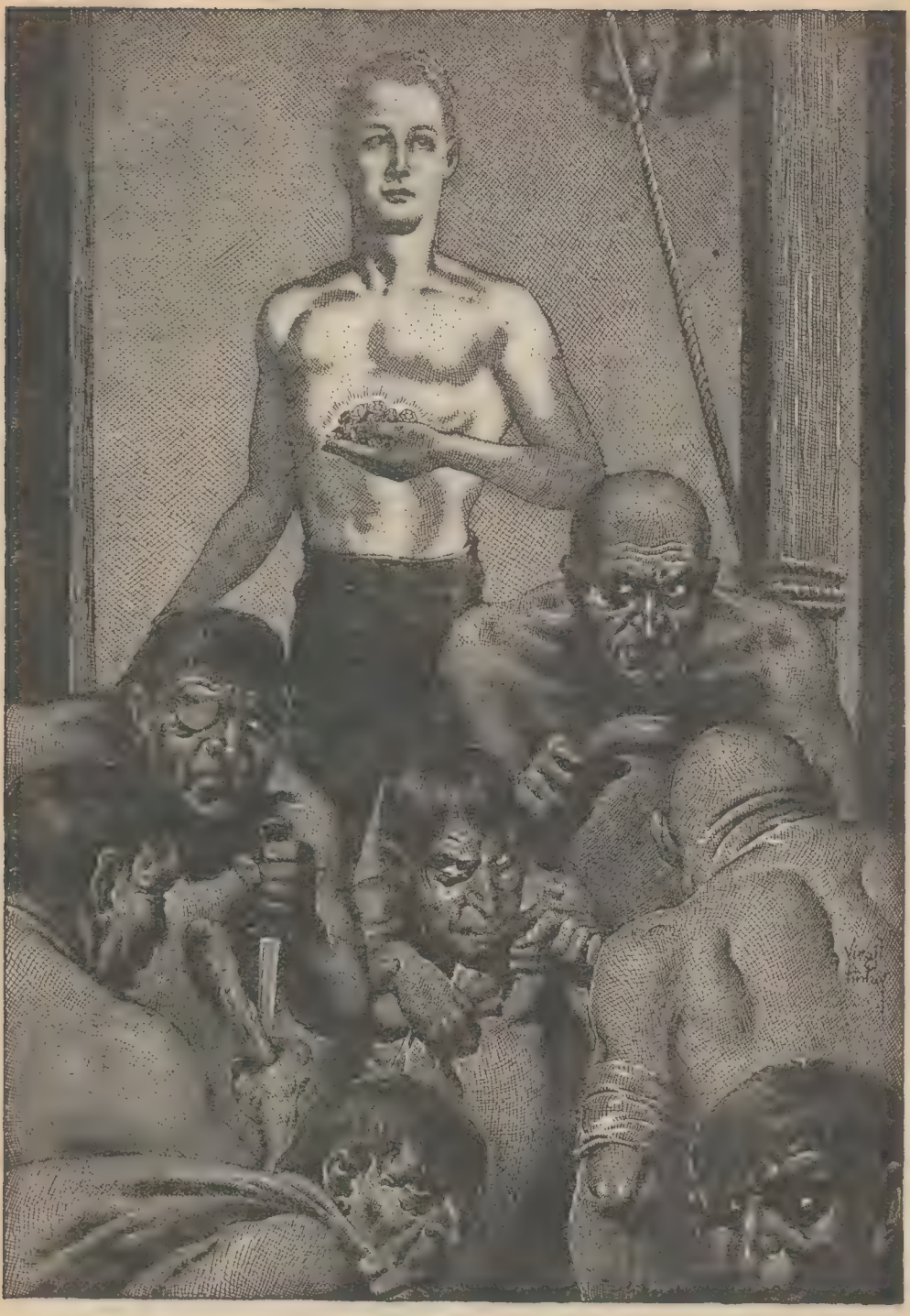
It had been one of my days of depression, so that I knew, it was almost certain, that I could expect the Master. My work was done; but I waited; I knew that he would come. My wife had telephoned a little while before; and I had told her. She loved him, even as I, and was glad to hear it. Some time before I had heard the whistle of the ferry-boat out on the water; the next car would surely bring him.

The clouds had gathered together, and an eery mooing wind was coming from the south; only to the west was there a patch of clear sky, gleaming with the pink of sunset. A fleck upon the window, another, then another, a sudden spatter growing into a trickle emphasized the storm's approaching. I looked down at my watch. As I did so I could hear the local coming into town. Knowing that it bore him, I pulled on my overcoat and hat and, after hunting up an umbrella that had not been used for months, stepped out upon the sidewalk.

The splashing of rain drops, the coming of nightfall, and the instinctive shrinking of every living thing to cover gave to the world a somberness that held one's spirit. It was just such a night as gave to brooding and to study. A wagon rattled down a by-street; an auto skidded around the corner; everything seemed slippery.

Somehow the air seemed weighted: the sound of splashing, the moisture, the soughing south wind wrought upon me; I had the feeling, the old instinctive clutching that was forewarning—almost as though the wind kept saying: "Something, something, something, is about to happen!" It was fleeting, to be sure, a catching of the throat, a flutter, a sort of nervousness that caught and held me. I will not call it premonition.

By this time the crowd was coming from the local, scurrying, as all unprotected throngs do, in the first storm of the season. Among them I caught the erect form of the Master walking leisurely along, as was his custom. In his long coat, his white beard, his calm and well-poised bearing there was ever something to hold him apart from his fellows. I always had the feeling that he was different from all other mortals, or, rather, that he was something that others could



The man was spectacular in his methods. He had earned through the astounding brilliancy of his campaigns, the title, "KING OF THIEVES"

become, if they wished it; there was ever something about him of culmination, of man passed out of the gross and grown into a plane that is higher. He smiled and came over to me.

"The first storm of the season," is how he greeted me.

"Yes," I answered, "the first one, and coming in the evening a little gloomy."

"My dear Walter!" he answered, sharing my umbrella and placing his hand upon my shoulder. "You have got them again, I see. You make of yourself a barometer. Let us go home to your wife and babies; let us play about in their sunshine."

IT WAS the same old story. The Master never said much, but ever by his mere presence he shed his gladness. The spell wore away from me, and the old feeling of lightness and content came back. I never knew how he did it—whether it was his personality or what.

Neither of us was given much to talking, so we picked our way in silence. But just as we reached the gate he spoke:

"I have news to tell you, Walter."

"News?"

"Yes, news of Witherspoon. Of George Witherspoon, your playmate. Of him who was and is 'The Rebel Soul'!"

"Where is he?" A sensation of eagerness and fear came over me; he was a man I loved and hated.

"I do not know. That is exactly. One of us, Bray, has reported from London that he has seen him. He tells me he is still the same, only grown a little older and a little bit more sober."

The wind caught in the evergreen as he said it and a shower of drops fell upon us. The light from the windows streaming on the lawn lit up the moisture like the sheen of a million jewels.

"What— What is he doing—did he say?"

"Bray investigated. George Witherspoon is a thief!"

A thief! George Witherspoon! The playmate of my childhood! That golden head of innocence! He who in his youth would do no thing of evil! The spirit of all gladness living in the shadows! The vista of the happy days of our boyhood flashed before me. And a thief! I could only mutter with a voice that was badly shaken:

"George Witherspoon a thief!"

"Yes," returned the Master. "And you know, Walter, what that means."

"What?"

"It means that if he is a thief he is more than that; his genius will drive him on. If George Witherspoon is a thief, he is the king of thieves! The police have got their hands full!"

"And they will beat him!"

"No, never! Not in a thousand years. His is a kind that they cannot handle. And therein lies the danger. George Witherspoon can do more harm than a mighty army. His is a drunken spirit burning. We have been working on the case, and I think have reached solution. We must go to his assistance!"

"We?"

"Yes, you and I."

I shuddered. I had had experience once before. "Please count me out!" I amended.

"Ah," said the Master, "but you will come; it is your destiny; and we need you, George Witherspoon and I!"

The sound of our voices had been heard in the house; the door was opened and Clara called out:

"Is that you, Walter? What in the world are you doing out there in the rain? You will catch your death of cold. And is the Master with you? I should think that you are old enough by this time to keep out of the wet."

"I was just telling Mr. Warren a few secrets," laughed the Master; "we are coming. There—there," he laughed when we had entered the house; it does look a little foolish: two grown men standing in the rain and talking."

In the other room we could hear the children talking and the tinkled musical intonation of a young feminine voice just bursting into laughter. I would have known it among a thousand: it was silvery and distinct, rich with mellowness, and flooding the air with sweetness.

"Roselle is here?" I asked simply.

"Yes, Walter, and the children are just bursting over with joy. I don't know how she does it, but she can make sunshine out of midnight. She is ever so happy. I just now told her that she is a bird of paradise."

"She will interest you," I said to the Master. "She is Witherspoon again—only woman. She is of the same happy fascinating sunshine."

"Walter, what are you saying?"

"But she is."

"Please—please," pleaded my wife, "don't compare our Roselle to—that."

Just here a door was opened and one

of the children came rushing in upon us, shouting with laughter. Behind him came another child, a little girl. She was bedecked with ribbons, and Roselle was holding two long streamers, clucking out: "Git ap!" coming after. They were coming so swiftly and were so interested that before they knew it they had almost upset the Master.

"Roselle!"

For the first time she noticed there was a stranger; and, like the girl she was, instinctively touched her fingers to her wealth of hair.

"Roselle, will you always be roisterous? This is the Master."

She laughed and bowed. "You sober, old, young people. We were just having so much fun." Then to the Master: "I really have to come down here once in a while and gladden them into life. If I didn't those little tots would be old before they got in school."

The old man laughed in answer, and his eyes were a little brighter. I could see that she interested him deeply. And what wonder? Every grace that George Witherspoon had of physical manhood this girl had as a woman. Her form, her face, her symmetry, her personality, all magnetic. The wonderful chiseled perfection of flawless beauty, the shining black, wavy hair, eyes that were jet and Spanish, that glowed and danced with color, and in which one could fancy as he looked were gleaming the scintillations of a thousand dreams.

I ever fancied when I watched her that there had been thrown upon her the fairy gossamer of illusive fascinations. There was poetry and passion and enticement. She was of the type of beauty that women can but admire, but which drives men to madness. One realized instinctively the subtleness that was hers and the power, if she would but use it. A type of the superwoman in her girlhood. It took no stretch of the imagination to picture her as a Fata Morgana or a Helen. To play with wounded hearts and to stack them—that was her destiny.

I think that the Master saw it at once and understood her intuitively. His was a way of understanding, of looking through all natures and reading into the soul. He could do what others could not: he could penetrate past the maze of external fascinations into the inner spirit, and he could understand it.

Nevertheless, he was human and a man, and I could see that even upon him her beauty had done its working. His eyes were brighter, his laughter was younger, and there seemed all about him an interest as in something that he had but just discovered.

When we were alone, just before dinner, he turned to me.

"You are right, Walter—certainly right. Another Witherspoon, only here a woman. God knows what would happen if they should meet!"

"And may He grant that they never shall!"

The Master ignored my interruption. "On the day they do meet," he continued, "that day you lose Roselle. They were born for the mating, their spirits will call each other. Out of the deep, out of the infinite the twin-souls will twine together. I fear, Walter, that your wish is destined to be futile. There are some things that will be."

CHAPTER II

THE PORTRAIT

THE thought gave me a sudden gripping pain. I had never, in thinking of Roselle, thought of anything but a flower in the blooming and her splendid, fascinating beauty as a woman. True, I had recognized the qualities, the hidden subtle alluring that raised her to a plane above her companions, and had felt that her enticing body was alive with magnetic potentiality. Her happy winsomness I had compared to the sunshine that had once been George's. But never with such a thought as this. To be a mate—to be as one with George Witherspoon! Ah, never!

Again, and in spite of the Master, the old feeling of quivering foreboding flushed upon me like a flood, blotting out all else in the wave of apprehension. But, I thought, instinctively, blindly, pleadingly, almost forcing the future with the intenseness of my wishing: "If it must come, let it be I and not Roselle." I could hear her laughing in the other room, and hear the children; and even as I thought they came bursting into the room, drowning out my forebodings with the music of their voices.

"Things of joy!" spoke out the Master. "Would that they could always be just so!" With that he reached out for little George and placed him on his knee, and with the others cuddled about him proceeded to tell a story.

The child he picked up had ever been

to the kind, old man the favorite of the three. He had been sick and puny almost from the day of birth, and for some reason, which neither I nor the doctor, nor anyone else could quite understand, seemed never destined to grow into the full vigor of his childhood. He had life, to be sure; but not exuberance: he played, but only in imitation of the others. I had insisted on naming him George, and had ever after been under a mild censure from my wife who held that as a name accursed! And indeed it seemed now that perhaps she might be right. What right had I to fasten a weight upon his childhood?

But to the Master the child had ever been a favorite. Perhaps he could see deeper than I, or even deeper than my wife, or it may have been the name itself that attracted. I had ever thought that he had a great love for the one that the little one had been named for; there was ever something about George Witherspoon, in the days that had been, that called for the greatest of affection. He had been a ray of sunshine.

What he was to the others he was even more so to the Master. He could look behind the gladness and distinguish the soul that was hidden, the incomprehensible spirit, and he could recognize the problem therein unfolded, and could see in him certain clues, which are so very rare, but which do occasionally fall among us to demonstrate that man is not all mud and clay. A problem, a solution, a spirit to admire but one unfortunately gone all wrong. I have ever noticed that a mother loves an errant son better than the others. So with the Master.

They sat there, the children, the Master, and Roselle. I could plainly see that the girl was greatly taken with my old friend of wisdom. He had a way about him, of greatness, kindness, and gentleness that won all hearts of whatever age and condition. With the children it was the same as with the others. He entered into their playing with an understanding, an appreciation that held them equal; he had a wonderful fund of stories and a way of getting down to their level; he could become a child as easily as he could be a man of wisdom.

I could see that he was getting into Roselle's heart as he did into all others. There was laughter and interest and wonder in his stories. The little ones sat and listened, clapped their hands and wondered. Then dinner, and afterward the children all abed, and we, the grown-ups, sitting by the fire and listening to the storm that had fallen.

I do not know just how the thing came about—but in one of those shifts which conversation has a way of taking, the name of Witherspoon became the subject. Roselle had heard of him, and before this, without our knowing of it, had been picking up odds and ends about him.

At the very mention of his name she was all attention. It seemed appropriate that the name of one who had gone to the shadows, and who was all flash and fury, should be the subject with the storms descending.

"Do tell me all about him!" she exclaimed. "I have heard of him; what I have been told has sounded more like the tale of a fairy prince than a thing of fact and reason."

My wife laid down her sewing. Outside the wind fighting through the storm descending lashed the trees into a whirring roar.

"Roselle," she cautioned, "you are always looking into something that is connected with the devil. Of all the persons that you should not learn about that one is George Witherspoon. You have heard that he was the handsomest of men, vivacious and dazzling, and it has suited your silly ears. But you will learn more as you grow older: you will understand that handsome is as handsome does, to use the old, old saying. And George Witherspoon has not done handsome."

"Gracious me!" laughed the girl. "Why—why, Clara, poor dear sobersocks, must we only love the poor and ugly!" She tossed her black head prettily; the light from the fire gleamed in her hair. "Only the poor and ugly! If we are interested in one that is handsome a dozen chaperons are calling: 'Don't—don't, he'll bite you!' And, anyway"—a little spitefully—"I've heard that at one time or another half the girls in this town have been head over heels in love with him. What harm can there be in my merely talking?"

Clara bit her lip. What the girl had said was so: what could be the harm in simply talking? The man was now only a recollection and was gone forever.

THE girl was cuddled on the floor before the fire, her hands in her lap, her beauty wonderfully effective in the soft

glow of the light. She was one of those rare creatures who are alluring in abandonment. Somehow of late she had grown even more enticing; there was that about her—a call, a beckon, and suggestion. When she tossed her pretty head, none of us could deny her. She had a way of getting what she wanted.

Now that she was on the trail of Witherspoon and his story, I knew that she would get it, she would wheedle it out, coax or argue, but in the end she would have it.

Therefore, when she turned to me, I must, even against the protests of my wife, tell to her the narrative of our life from the beginning, and with the love that I had for the period of our boyhood, for the sunshine, happiness, and openness that had been George Witherspoon, I have no doubt of the picture that I painted. When I talked of him I could always throw my love into my words.

I told her of his beauty, of his brightness, how he was the first in all his studies, how, with no apparent effort, he was ever the leader of his classes; his wonderful achievements as an athlete, of his generosity. I explained how the change came on him, how, from the personification of all gladness, he went to the shadows and became the embodiment of solid hatred. There was now nothing of evil that he would not do—no morals that would bind him, laws or customs.

And the Master! When I had finished he picked up the thread of discourse. With his splendid command of language he drew a vivid picture of George Witherspoon, great, true, wonderful and weird, a flash of sunshine streaking through the darkness—obeying no law nor order, loving no man whatever, a being to himself, godlike, dazzling, and unfathomable.

My wife had dropped her work and was watching Roselle. As indeed was I, for with the recitation her eyes sparkled and a look we had never seen before was in them. Dreaming, admiring, flooding in the depths as though a storm hitherto unguessed was opened. Her lips, red as the reddest lips that ever called a lover, were slightly parted: her hands clasped in her lap and her whole form tense and listening, rigid, vivid and impressive, a living statue.

Such beauty is only given once in a lifetime. Hers was the kind of love that once aroused not all in the world could hinder, which would consume, destroy, sacrifice everything for attainment. The passion in those eyes, the depths and shadows told of the fires a-smolder. Somehow I had the feeling, intuitive, perhaps, but clutching, that she, that they, she and the Rebel Soul would come together.

And if they did, would she go with him? I closed my eyes to shut out the dreaded picture.

The Master ceased his talking. For a moment all was silent. And then Roselle, with her face to me—a face that was flushed and eager:

"Cousin Walter, I want you to bring me his picture!" The way in which she said it, and the manner, stood for no contradiction—it was settled. I went and got it.

For a long while she studied it. Then she stood erect.

"That," she said, "is a man! What a man should be. That is the kind of man I am going to love. A man of life and action; beautiful and strong. Who is afraid of nothing, whose every breath of living is a moment of adventure; who is alone against the world, who goes along, as the Master says, 'like a thing of light flashing through the darkness!'"

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

"Or a thing of evil!" amended my wife. "George Witherspoon is a thing of light only in his person; his deeds are darkness!"

"What of it!" exclaimed Roselle. "He is alone; he is splendid; he is beautiful, and the world is against him. What if he doesn't come up to your standards: the man who fights against all society is a hero!"

"Silly child!" corrected my wife. "Foolish and romantic!"

But the other tossed her head and stood there, a goddess just born into being, her eyes flecked with emotion, her whole form vibrant, her beauty scintillating with the fire just entered, vitalized, glowing, unquenchable.

"I do not care. He is alone; he is immense; he is against the world; he is a man." She held the picture up. "I am going to keep it. You will allow me to, won't you, Walter? I shall keep it always —always."

With that, without another word or gesture, she opened wide the door and was racing up the stairway.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE WITHERSPOON

FOR some moments not a one of us said a word. My wife, her face slightly clouded and her fingers shaking perceptibly, resumed her work; the Master watched, with those large unknowable eyes of his, the fantastic ember imagery in the fireplace.

Outside the storm was focused to a roar, and the fierce, defiant splatter against the window, the incessant sound of the falling water, the pouring from the eave-spouts wrought upon me and sharpened to poignant piercing the anxiety that held me.

It was Clara who broke the silence.

"I am afraid, Walter, that you should not have told her. She is only a girl and too romantic. There was ever something about George Witherspoon wonderfully magnetic. Even now he's gone there is that about him that will set a young girl's blood a-tingle. You know what he was at college. His spirit was too radiating.

"All girls are prone to handsome heroes; and when they are adventurous, brave, daring, and have the glamour of the unknown thrown about them, they are doubly so. That is the only side of George Witherspoon that Roselle can see. She cannot discern the fiend and sin that lurks in the splendid body. You have merely aroused feelings in her heart that it is wicked to awaken. She is a child, defenseless. You have made a grave mistake."

Perhaps so. I said nothing; my heart was disturbed by vague misgivings. I loved Roselle—and I had loved the other. Was it possible that they would come together? Why was it that out of my life I should give my two loved ones? What was this wonderful beauty and the mystery that lurked behind it? Two, those two, the most radiating beings on earth, were enigmatic. Why was it?

We look into the eyes of our dearest friends and imagine that we see them. What we look at are mere externals, movements of living muscle; we see nothing. For all that we know the other might be a million miles away; we never see him. The soul, the real soul, is always hidden; all we see is muscle, actions and reactions.

But the Master, always ready, took up the situation. He had a soft way of being cheery, of mellowing the flow of thought, of bringing, as it were, the light out of the darkness.

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Warren. George Witherspoon is not what you think him. There is nothing wrong in telling Roselle—she is a woman. She has passed out of her childhood. Perhaps she and the other are to come together. So be it! It is their destiny. But if they do, only good can come of it. If Witherspoon needs Roselle, and the fates decree it, it is not for us to hinder.

"I am sure," he continued, "that there are wonderful things awaiting. He whom you have classed as sin eternal, the embodiment of all hatred, is really all light and goodness. A great unsolved mystery is before us, deep beyond all human ken or imagination. George Witherspoon is fighting alone against all the evils of all eternity. We must go to his assistance. And we may need Roselle."

My wife had resumed her sewing; her sad lips were compressed in a thin, straight line of decision. She admired the Master and loved him; but it is hard to excuse sin to a really good woman; she sees things as they are; sin is sin and nothing else; there is no extenuation.

"Yes," she answered, "he is to be pitied! And so is the devil. And the devil is George Witherspoon. Wait and see!"

Just then a noise in the other room—a child wailing and coughing and calling "mama." The Master and I were left alone to our meditations.

The words of the Master had caught me. Could it be that, after all, the George of my childhood, the old George, my George, was innocent? Could he be brought back to me unscathed and spotless? Could it be that he was calling, that there was something that I could do, that he was even now with his back to the wall fighting back forces that I could not dream of? Could it be that he who was against all society was fighting despairingly against a greater power as well?

My old love welled up in me; I would go anywhere, to the end of the earth, to help him. A sudden rush of spirit caught me, rolling me in an exultant wave. There was hope—hope; we could do it.

The Master saw it. He had a way of understanding, even before I had spoken. A quiet, satisfied smile was on his features; the kindly light that was ever in his eyes grew kinder. He moved his chair closer to the grate and poked the living coals till the room was alight with flickering brightness. Even as he had stirred the embers of my mind into glowing.

"And so, Walter," he said quietly, "you are decided. You are going with me after Witherspoon."

I nodded. "Yes; I have decided. But what shall we do? How can we do it—and where must we go to seek him?"

"Into the Infinite!"

He dazed me. "Into—" I asked. "Where did you say? Into where?"

"Into the Infinite!"

"That is rather a large place; I am afraid that I do not understand you."

"Perhaps not, Walter. It really is rather enigmatical. Nevertheless, it is so. I shall try to explain it. The infinite, as you say, is rather a large place—so large in fact that there is no other. It is all-embracing. But it is not so far away. It is really right beside us, we are part of its very being. The trouble is in our conception. We are accustomed to think in limits.

"ASK any man what he thinks of infinity, and he answers in space or numbers; he tries instinctively to think of the ultimate that he knows is missing—never of himself as part. He himself is sure and settled; he is a man. Infinity is something else entirely, the end that is missing. He is like you and me and everyone: for he is conceited with himself.

"Walter, infinity is ourselves. It is here with us all the time; we are infinitesimal, a million times divided infinitesimally. The laws that we have evolved are nothing; we are shadows, but, nevertheless, we are something. It is our good fortune that we misconceive it; it is the law of nature; we are ourselves.

"But there are times when it falls upon us. George Witherspoon is outside of all our laws and reasons. To explain him we must go away from ourselves, go beyond all our known conceptions. We must go into infinity for the law that holds him.

"For he is not impossible—the mere fact of his being proves it. Just so sure as there is a positive, there is a reason. Nothing can exist without it. This is one of the cases that make us conscious of our insignificance. When we are through you will realize what I am saying."

Then I asked eagerly: "You have a clue to work on. You have learned something?"

"We think so. I will tell you one thing, and it may startle you: George Witherspoon is not a man. He is an ultimate, a forecast, or what you will; but he is not a man—not as we conceive him."

It indeed was startling. "What is he, then? Spirit, imp, or devil!"

The old man smiled benignly. "No," he reassured, "not that, nor anything of the sort; he is the most material thing in the world. He is neither imp nor devil, nor yet a spirit! There is nothing impossible about him, yet he is beyond all our rules and reasons. When anything like this takes place we all of us straightway jump to the supernatural.

"But he is not supernatural, even though he does not come within the precepts of mere mortals. You and I and anyone could become even such as he, if granted certain conditions. He is the one exception to the rule of mankind that I know of. And you know all rules must have exceptions."

Neither man, imp, spirit, nor the devil? What was there left that he could be? Surely he was something. But the Master would not enlighten me.

"No," he said when I asked him. "I shall not tell you. Besides, I may be wrong. After it is all over and I have worked the problem to the finish, and we have in our hands the solution, then you can have the facts. I am taking you along as a witness.

"After what you have experienced and in view of your love for your old companion, it is right that you should witness, step by step, the strange and remarkable events which will lead to the conclusion. And I warn you there are dangers; our way will be full of pitfalls, perils will be multiplied a hundredfold, hidden and unseen.

"But of one thing you can rest assured: George Witherspoon is not a thing of darkness; rather is he one of light. We must go to him. He is living in the Infinite. We must bring back the companion of your childhood."

"Amen, to that!" I said.

Just then a voice from the stairway. It was Clara calling: "Walter!" There was that in the voice which startled and told of a mother's worry.

"Will you call up the doctor, Walter? Georgie is very sick again. As soon as you get him come up to the room."

In a moment I had the doctor. It was the same doctor, by the way, for whom I had hurried, years before, on the night of our graduation. The child had been sickly from the cradle, and it was nothing unusual for us to have him. He promised to come very shortly. Then I excused myself to the Master and went up to the sick-room.

The little one was in his mother's arms. He was very sick, indeed, burning up with fever and coughing slightly. Like most fathers, I could only smooth his head, feel his pulse, and say: "Poor little darling!"

I could feel a world of love for the frail, little being lying there in his weakness. Clara was crooning softly. "Poor little angel," she was saying; "why, oh, why, did we name you George?" Every time that she said that it cut me like a knife-thrust.

A clatter upon the walk— Undoubtedly the doctor. The bell rang. I went to the door to meet him. A gust of wind came with the opening: the rain driven in lateral sheets sprayed in our faces.

"A night for the devil!" exclaimed the doctor, stepping inside. He was wet, and the rain sogging in his hat and garments sparkled with crystalline effulgence in the lamplight. "How is the little one?" He removed his rubbers deftly, and, picking up his case, went with me up to the sick-room.

In a little while he was gone; but he left us with the dreaded knowledge that the little one was very ill, indeed. He would call again in the morning. When I opened the door for his departure, and we stood, both of us, looking out into the dreadful night, he whistled.

"Do you know, Warren," he said, "I never go out in a night like this that I don't think of George Witherspoon."

Even he! It startled me. Why should everybody, everyone suddenly get to thinking of George Witherspoon?

"Why?"

"I don't know. He must have been born for storm and conflict. There must be an affinity between his spirit and the tempest. To ride the lightning, to lash the storm's wild whirlwind. He seems symbolic. I, who am not a mystic, whose whole life is prosaic, cannot help but think so. It haunts me! Don't you think that there was always something about that man that seemed potential? By the way, what became of him?"

"You know as much as I do."

"Not a word?"

"Just rumors. Last time from London."

"Strange, strange, a wonderful character—why should he haunt me? Well, I must be going."

A moment later I heard his car sluing along on the flooded pavement. I shivered. Outside was all darkness and a roar. The tempest and George Witherspoon; even the doctor!

At last I shut the door carefully, and with a foreboding, heavy heart ascended the stairs to my loved ones. Clara was sitting by the bed of the little one, her beautiful face drawn with worry, her hand lightly on the snow-white coverlet, and her eyes watching with a tenderness that was pathetic the suffering of little George.

To be near her and to cheer her, and to do what little I could, I drew a chair alongside. For some time we sat together. Neither of us spoke a word; but our thoughts were full of sorrow. And I could not resist my fleeting transitory self-condemnations.

My mind was shifting between sorrow and rebuke. In spite of my reason and common sense I had an intuitive sensing that the trouble of the little one was in great part my own. And yet—a mere name—what could it amount to?

I do not know how long we sat there. It may have been a few minutes, and it may have been an hour. I was so engrossed that I only heard, as in the distance, the fury of the tempest sweeping. Once I recall faintly in the lull the *tick!*

tick! tick! of the clock upon the stairs. I remember thinking of the Master, of the doctor, and then finally and abruptly stopping at Witherspoon.

I don't know why, but the very thought of his name now became suddenly oppressive. A lump came in my throat, a sense of impotent dread and predestination. Instinctively I took my wife's hand for human companionship and consolation. At the same moment, reaching its culmination, the storm focused into fire and lightning, a great clap of thunder, as if the earth were broken, slammed down upon us. The house seemed to quake and shiver.

My wife hovered over the baby, and I, out of my very nature, stood close to reassure her. At the instant someone laughed, a haunting, taunting laugh, cadent, and bringing a world of memory. Astonished and dumbfounded, I glanced across my shoulder. Standing in the doorway was George Witherspoon!

CHAPTER IV

"I AM HIS—ALL HIS!"

"GEORGE!"

That was all I could say. Just that. It was more of a gasp than an utterance. My wife clutched me by the arm, but sat down calmly. He was the same old George—beautiful beyond expression, with the atmosphere about him of a god just stepped from Olympus: the same poise and bearing, the same winsome smile, the same blue eyes of laughter.

His form was enrobed in a great, dark overcoat, into which, on either side, his hands were thrust into the pockets. For a while he was silent—not moving a single muscle, calmly regarding with critical judgment the circle of our little family. In the moment I had time to observe him, to study carefully that indefinable something which ever characterized and made him so different from his fellows. It was the old George of my school days; the old George come back from the sin and shadow.

"Walter!"

A surge of tenderness swept over me, sweeping me to my feet in a wild joy of welcome.

"George!" I exclaimed. "Oh, George, my George!"

But he held up his hand to stop me. "Not a step nearer!" he commanded. And I obeyed him.

"What—what is it?" I asked in wonder. I could see that his eyes were moistened, that he was shedding tears. It was indeed my George. The other never shed them.

"Poor little Walter. If you could only understand. And you love me. After what is past you love. You are the most wonderful little man living! Do you remember, Walter, the last words that I spoke to you?"

Would I ever forget them! I quoted them just as he had said them:

"'Remember, Walter, that I always loved you.'"

"Just so. And you have always believed them?"

"Always."

I made another movement to approach him, but again he stopped me.

"Forgive me, Walter," he said. "But don't come nearer. I am dangerous. Though I have come to you as myself out of the land of shadow, I am potential. Almost anything might happen."

"Then, George," I asked, "what is it? Is it I? Is there something that I can do? Do you need me? Tell me!" It seemed so impossible that I should help him—that he should ask it.

He glanced down at his watch, and as he did so I noticed it was aflame with jewels—a work that was almost priceless.

"Listen, Walter!" he said. "I have only a moment—a few moments at the most. And then for your safety and Clara's, I must be going. I have come to you out of the darkness. You are my only friend. I am neither man nor spirit. I want you to help me, follow me to the end of the earth and save me. See the Master; he's the one to do it, and bring him with you. But be careful!

"I am the old George for but a moment. After this I may kill you on sight—there is no telling. Again, I may love you. I shall know no law nor reason. I am outside all man-made orders; I have no morals. But I want to be human; I want to be a man. I want to live and love and suffer."

Here he glanced at Clara, who was tenderly, solicitously, lovingly watching over our little one, and, though listening, was endeavoring in every way to shield him from the other. But George saw, stepped closer, and looked at his namesake.

"Ah!" he said. "Poor—poor little fellow!" Then in wonderment: "Why, he is ill! What is his name?"

"George."

"Ah!"

He stepped over to the bedside and, with a swift, certain movement, started to take him up.

"No, no, no!" screamed Clara. "He's mine, mine! You shall not have him!"

"Listen, Clara!" he said calmly, and there was certitude, conviction, and kindness past all understanding in the words. "I can save him. I have only a moment, but I must do it for you and Walter. Just one good, little deed."

Then, before we could stop him, he had plucked up the little one and passed out the doorway. We could hear him rushing, almost leaping, down the stairway; a gust of cold air told of the front door open. Then silence. My wife was wide-eyed with terror; and a hysteria that I thought would come upon her.

But just then we heard a baby's laughter. Coming up the stairs was George with the child upon his shoulder. At every lurch of his body the little one was laughing.

"There!" he said, placing him in the lap of his mother. "That's the only good deed I have ever done. He will never be sick again. For you and Walter."

Then he straightened; a look came in his face that made me wonder, the old, wild look of the devil playing! But he controlled it. He stepped over to the door.

The storm had now grown silent. Out in hall I thought I heard the soft tread of a woman's footsteps. How wonderful he was as he stood there! There was that about him of a soul in mighty conflict, fighting and triumphant.

"It has come, Walter," he said calmly. "I must leave you. Seek me! For the love of your old playmate, seek me! Hunt toil, and trouble, tribulation and privation; the world where it is upside down. But, beware; be careful! I may kill you! I am the Rebel Soul and have no morals! God bless you!"

With that he was gone; I heard his footsteps down the hallway, and I heard, too, the sound I had noticed a moment before of a woman walking. Who was it? I stepped over to the door.

At the head of the stairs was Roselle. She and the other had come together. They did not parley. I saw him open his arms and her spring in toward him. I saw their faces, his the most beautiful of mankind, and hers glowing, lifted to his with untold passion. It did not seem strange; but simply as it should be.

Then he kissed her. There was that in their kiss which seemed to concentrate all the ineffable essences of the world in a single contact.

Had it been any other person in the world but he, it might have appeared improper. We have certain codes and morals, standards, and etiquettes that bind us; we are slaves to custom. But such things meant nothing to this one whatever; his radiating spirit went straight to its object; he stood for no refusal; but got what he was after. Just now it was Roselle.

It was no courtship—just seizure and surrender; he put his arms about her and held her close—oh, so close that their forms seemed to grow together. It was a picture I shall ever remember; she, her whole body vibrant, her face held up to his, her lips trembling with emotion, charmed by his mighty spirit; he all grace and beauty, his arms about her and whispering words which made her his own and only. The old, wild spirit, the old, wild laughter in the eyes, the boyishness, the glamour!

THERE never was a woman could look at him but what her heart was moved; with Roselle it was conquest. She had surrendered—happily, everlastingly surrendered to the Rebel Soul! What I had feared had happened; and now that it was done I was strangely happy. It was as it should be. The two most beautiful things had come together; the anguish of the early part of the evening was flushed out by a happy consciousness that these loved ones were for each other. Back of my consciousness an intuition kept saying: It is best, something will come of it, destiny divine; it is as it should be.

In another instant he was gone. In the light, standing by the stairway, was Roselle, silent, scarcely moving, her whole form charged with the new-born passion; her eyes deep with longing, peering after. The hand upon the post was tense with gripping, her breast heaving.

"Roselle."

She turned and saw me in the doorway. Then she came over to me. She was another one entirely. The little girl I had known so long was gone forever. Without saying a single word, she passed me and sat down by my wife, who was playing with little George. She picked up her hand and pressed it. With a woman's intuition—Clara understood it.

"Walter," she said—just that. "Walter."

I nodded. "God's will be done," I answered. "God's will be done."

But nothing is done for a woman unless she wills it; she turned to her cousin. Roselle shook her head emphatically to impress my answer.

"I am his, Clara; all his. I met him in the hallway; I met George Witherspoon! George Witherspoon is an angel!"

With that she broke into sobbing.

By this time, it was getting along into the night. It struck me suddenly that everything, the whole course of events, had been unnatural. I remembered all at once the Master. Why had I, who was always so punctilious, abandoned him so completely while these events had been happening? I had excused myself for but a moment, and had left him alone for hours.

And Roselle? What was the matter? At any other time, with a sick child, she would have been all solicitation. With the storm raging, the wild roaring of the tempest, she had locked herself away from all others. I questioned her. She had been sleeping. She had not awakened until she thought she heard someone calling. Then she stepped out into the hallway where—

DOWNSTAIRS I found the Master. He was seated before the fire, which had dwindled to gray ash embers, his arms folded, his head drooped on his breast, and sleeping. I touched him. In an instant his eyes were open, peering at me out of the limpid blue and the full of understanding.

"George Witherspoon has been here," he said calmly.

"You saw him?" I asked.

"I saw nothing. I have been asleep. But George Witherspoon has been here. He came with the breath of the lightning; he has cured your child, which the doctor could not do. He has met Roselle. And he has left a pledge to caution you of the future."

"A pledge?"

"Yes. Have you not examined it?"

The Master had been dreaming; and, by some incomprehensible accident, of circumstances that had really happened. But there was no pledge. Not that I knew of. This I told him.

"Let us see."

Together we ascended the stairs to the room where Clara and Roselle, quite happy now, were watching over little George. The youngster was smiling happily in his sleep, with his two chubby little fists held tight upon his breast. The

"There! This is the only good deed I have ever done. Little George will never be ill again!"

Master said nothing, but quietly, carefully, bent over. The left hand of the little one he opened gently. As he did so, a green sparkle dropped upon the coverlet; a dreaming, fascinating celestial color, like all the coolness and freshness of the universe trickled into a single raindrop. It was an emerald—the largest, most perfect, and the purest one that I had ever seen.

"I thought so." The Master picked it up, examined it carefully, and passed it to me.

"Keep it," he said, "as a pledge of the future. You may need it."

CHAPTER V

THE KING OF THIEVES

THAT concluded the eventful evening, the strangest, the most wonderful and potential of all my lifetime—and, in truth, of any other—which was destined to lead to strange adventures, and to lay bare weird and unknown mysteries that have scarce been dreamed of. Henceforth I was to be minutely conscious of what an infinitesimal atom man is in eternity's unending cosmos; that he is not even that; but far on down the scale descending, so far down that an ion were a magnitude beside.

The words of the doctor came back to me, pulsing my consciousness with potent memory. "He seemed born for the storm and conflict. There was an affinity between him and the wild, wild roaring. He was symbolic." Yet the Master had said that he was neither man nor spirit. What, then, could he be?

Just before retiring I opened the door and gazed out at the heavens.

The leaves of the trees were still dripping with the moisture. The full moon had risen over the line of mountains to the eastward, and the few clouds, broken, scattered, and peaceful, were tinted with the wonderful mellow colors of the moonbeams which we all of us know so well, but which no artist can ever reflect on canvas. There was a quietness in the air that permeated and soothed one's spirit: the softness and freshness that follows, in all countries of dry seasons, the first rain of the early autumn.

I took a deep, full breath of the delicious freshness. To me the scene had a double meaning, the coming of the first rain of the season, the tender sproutings by the roadside, the mantle of green upon the landscape; and the passing of a being that I could not fathom. He had come with the roar of the thunder, and he had passed away; but now that he was gone there was a quietness, peacefulness, and mellowness that thrilled one with the joy of being.

It would last forever—a storm there never was—it would be unending. So deep is the love of contentment embedded in us. There was not the slightest rustle. All was peace.

In the morning I went about my business. I was a man of steady habits, and could not, barring death or bereavement, allow anything to interfere with my daily routine. Roselle came down to breakfast early; and though she said little, I could see that what had happened the night before had wrought upon her. One could notice it in her eyes, and in the illusive enhancing of her beauty, which had now a purpose and an object. The pollen of the other's spirit had ripened the rose to its fullest blooming.

And I think that she was happy. Such things people shed about them—the luster of the eyes, the smiles, the infinitesimal unknowable waves of magnetic personality that warm us and make us thrill with responsive contact. Little George was sleeping quietly with the pink bloom of childhood upon his features. All of us—the Master, Clara, Roselle, the children—were as freshened as the glorious morning that had broken upon the landscape.

At the Master's suggestion, I wrapped up the emerald carefully and placed it in my pocket. I smiled when I did so, for I could not but think of the enormous value the little spot of space in my pocket represented. If there is one thing that a banker prizes, it is gold and values; and I was a banker, pure and simple. Not that I was covetous, for I never thought of possession; I did not even regard it as my own. But that I was like the rest of my ilk and profession, and could esteem that which through its beauty and worth represented the energy and comforts of a fair size fortune. I was just that certain of its value. And though I would not have neglected my routine duties for the world, I was in a feverish hurry to get them over so that I could see an expert.

Once I laid it down upon the desk and called for my assistant. The effect was even more convincing: his eyes popped out in amazement, in unconstrained as-

tonishment and admiration. One would not wish for a better attestation of its genuineness; mere glass could never adduce such emotion. There was a subtle allurement about its greenness, about its coolness, its color, its witchery, that was suggestive of all the freshness, mellowness, and sweetness of the earth condensed and centered.

As soon as I could get away, I was on the train bound for the city. I took it to one of the largest jewelers, where I was acquainted, and asked for an expert. He was a little man with heavy gold-bound glasses, bald, and very precise and dainty. I was led into his sanctum, and in a very casual way, as if handling a mere trifle, I undid my little package and laid the stone before him. You see, I was only human, and desired to increase the surprise which I thought I had in store for him. Perhaps I was a little bit dramatic. But he did not notice.

"What is this?" I asked very simply.

He turned the stone, with its green and wondrous luster, over with his finger like one awed and startled, like a devotee suddenly come into contact with a jeweled talisman of Mohammed. There was the reverence of the connoisseur, the splendid, fine, distinctive attitude of one who sees and breathes in beauty before he even thinks of values. I was a banker and a man of money; this man was an artist.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed, and almost in reverence, I thought, he clasped his hands behind him, and gazed with rapture at the green and glowing luster.

"What is it?" I asked.

He looked at me in wonder, absently, as if all his thoughts were glued upon the table.

"Is it? Is it? Why, man, it is Solomon's own jewel! No other! It can't be! Beyond all price and value! Priceless! Wait a minute!"

He pressed a button. A boy appeared.

"Tell Mr. Devins to come here immediately." Then to me: "I would take it to him, but it is priceless. I would not desecrate it with my fingers. And you packing it about in your pocket!"

AGAIN he backed off before it and stood in reverence. I noticed absently the soft, quiet coolness of the place, the great clock ticking, things of value here and there, and the table in the center. And the man before it: he was like one at the shrine of beauty reverencing something that is not meant for man nor human.

All this in a glimmer. For I was thinking. Not of the value nor of beauty, but of George Witherspoon, who could carry such a thing about in his pocket as a mere bauble; who could afford to give a child a plaything such as this. Who was he, what was he, and where did he obtain it? I remembered the sheen of jewels that flashed from his timepiece, as Mr. Devins came in.

The expert said nothing—merely pointed; then there were two. For some moments they stood there drinking in its beauty. Then the jeweler turned it over with his finger.

"Mr. Devins," he said, "do you know this stone? Can you classify it?"

"I would call it Solomon's own jewel."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know. But there was never another like it. Solomon had the greatest jewels. This stone is as much above all others as a diamond is above a lodestone. It is in a class by itself. It is—it is—" But he lost expression. "Magnificent!" was all that he could say.

Mr. Devins turned to me.

"It is for sale?" he asked.

I had not thought of that.

"Well, I don't know. Hardly. I don't know whether it is or not. Fact is, I don't know whether I own it. I came into its possession in a strange manner."

"How?"

But I had no idea of telling him. So I turned the subject.

"You do not recognize it? There is no stone like it? It has no history?"

The expert shook his head.

"Neither I nor any other man living. It is in a class by itself. It has a history, of course. But it is not of the stones that one knows. The only thing I can think of is the crown of Solomon. Compared to it, all other emeralds are bits of broken glass."

Mr. Devins turned it over again with his finger; he was a man of business, not a connoisseur like his assistant.

"You say it is not for sale. Would you or the party you represent consider, say —well, seventy-five thousand?"

"Seventy-five thousand!"

"Most assuredly."

"All that money for a little stone like that!"

"On the spot."

It was an enormous amount of money. I had thought of a few thousand, but never of such an amount as this. He had

not tested it. I had expected a careful examination and some hums and hawing.

"The stone speaks for itself," communed the expert in an ecstasy of rapture. "No need of any test. Though I shall test it just for routine."

In a short time he was back; his eyes sparkling.

"Absolutely perfect!" he exclaimed.

But in a short space my mind was settled. I recalled the words of the Master: "Keep it; you may need it." Anyway George had given it to his namesake. Who could tell?

Besides, the enormous value of the thing had moved me. I had that feeling of all hoarders; of mere pride of possession. I picked it up from the table.

"You do not care to dispose of it?" asked Mr. Devins.

"I think not."

"Well," he smiled, "any time, Mr. Warren. Any time. My offer is always open. For such as that there is always a market."

"Thank you."

A FEW days later I saw the Master. He expressed no surprise whatever, merely smiled and nodded as if it was one of the things we could expect when we were dealing with Witherspoon.

"It will give you an idea of what a personality he is," was his comment. "A mere trifle; to him such things are nothing. If they only were! Wealth, position, honor! All negative, every one!

"There is not a thing I know of that can hold him. In every other case that I have known you could use a man's weapons: here all such are useless, we have no leverage and we have no ground to stand on if we had one. The human mind, Walter, is a great and unknown sea; because we pull over it the fragile bark of our thinking, dipping the oars of our shallow wit into its surface we conceit ourselves that we understand it.

"We know nothing. The mind is the greatest mystery there is; as great as the deeps themselves. And like them it is only in its storms that we are conscious of insignificance. Witherspoon is the storm: we are the ships drifting here and there upon the seething conflict.

"You have seen a few things only. There are others coming that will be even more startling. Wealth to him is nothing: I am certain that if he wished it he could have all the wealth of the world for a plaything.

"Power? The mere fact that he has not seized it is the proof that he does not wish it. He could topple over all the kingdoms of the earth if he did but will it. He is as much ahead of mere mortals as the lightning is ahead of the whirlwind.

"What is he? That is for us to discover: for there is a solution to that, you can rest assured. Causation is the first law of the universe. We must await developments."

"But," I exclaimed, "I thought you knew. You said—"

"I said we were working: that we thought we had reached a solution. And I have told you just now that we have no ground to stand on. Both are true. What we have done is empirical.

"At first, we put two and two together and reached the definite earthly conclusion, which is four. We tried our rules and precepts and they got us nowhere. He was impossible. That is, to our known conceptions.

"Therefore we went where necessity forced us—out into the great unknown. It is as if we suddenly accepted two plus two as making five. Which we know it is not. At least on earth. Perhaps on the dog star it might be seven. Not even the greatest mathematician can tell us.

"But we have one clue. He has come back. Through some lapse, through some convulsing of the infinity that he is breathing; he has come to us for a moment. He has appealed for help.

"We know that he is what he is without volition. Therefore we shall wait; other developments are sure to follow: when the time comes and the psychological moment is at hand we shall seek him."

The Master spoke in enigmas. It was his studious life and peculiar profession that made him do so perhaps. To me with my sober habit and slower thinking and my routine affairs, he seemed almost as mysterious as the Rebel Soul himself.

But he was good, and his ultimate ends were certain and he was ever on the pathway of knowledge. Therefore I implicitly accepted now, as at every other time, what he told me. Developments were sure to follow. He was right.

It was not long after this that a little thing occurred which forewarned me that I was to have another visitation: though this one from the nature of the warning I had reasons for fearing, not for welcome. I was just returning from the

bank one evening when I noticed the postman passing out of our gate.

It was getting along toward winter and the days were short so that the shadows set in early. My wife was standing on the porch holding in her hand a letter. As I came up the steps she passed it to me. In the blur of the half light the handwriting seemed familiar. I had a peculiar feeling as though a well-known hand were reaching from the darkness; the instinctive certainty that one feels with a sudden premonition.

I carried it into the house and held it to the light to see what I already half suspected. I was right; my half apprehension had not deceived me; it was the writing of George Witherspoon. Perhaps my hand trembled a bit as I tore open the envelope. Clara clutched my arm.

"What is it, Walter?"

As if for answer, a card dropped out of the envelope: slipped through my nervous fingers and fell upon the carpet; a small card and very simple. I picked it up and read it. Across the center in plain black letters were the words:

THE KING OF THIEVES

CHAPTER VI

THE ORDER OF THE SEVENS

JUST then a door was opened and Roselle came in. My wife took the card out of my hand and read it: the girl in mischief peeked over her shoulder.

"Why," she laughed, "how funny: what can it mean? Isn't it odd?"

Clara looked the question. I have an idea she guessed the truth, which I determined right then and there that I would not tell her.

"What does it mean? What is it, Walter?"

"Nothing," I lied, "nothing: some advertising novelty perhaps: or most likely the advance notice of some moving picture."

I was not accustomed to prevarication, I always held to truth at all times as the safest, bravest and the only way: but this was one of the cases where a white lie was the only way of honor. I would have been a coward to fill my wife with apprehension. Though I was not noted for my bravery my shoulders were for all that broad enough to shed worry from my family.

And after all what was it? Merely a little card. Therefore I passed it off lightly; slipped it into my pocket and laughed the incident away.

But next day was different. In the secrecy of my office I drew it from my pocket. What did it amount to? What was it? Why was it? What new development was portending? I recalled the words of the Master:

"George Witherspoon is the King of Thieves. He is dangerous."

Ought I not to take it to the police? And if I did so what good would it do? It was too theatrical, too flavored of the melodramatic. It was not within reason that a King of Thieves would be sending a card about for identification. I had no knowledge of the underworld whatever: but I did know enough to realize that this was highly impossible to any but the Master and myself. The police would merely laugh, and if there was anything in the world that I could not bear up under, it was ridicule.

However, that night when I arrived home I saw things differently. I was a little later than usual and missed the postman. But upon the table, awaiting

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me, was another letter; the same thing, the same handwriting, card, everything. But the postmark on the envelope was of a different city.

I noted that the place was nearer and that the distance between the two was about that of a good day's travel. What could he be up to now? Something was afoot, of that I had not a thread of doubt. Perhaps after all I had better see the police.

In the morning I called up the Master and informed him what had happened and of my apprehension; also I told him of my hesitation in taking it before the authorities.

He laughed.

"For a man who was once a prosecuting attorney you do not appear to have much faith in the puissance of our police force."

"No," I answered, "I have not. Not in a case of this kind. They are hide-bound. They are a good deal like the law, tied up with rules and precedents. They have filtered crime down to system: they are trained to act in ruts and channels.

"Anything outside of their training is likely to shock them: this thing is melodramatic and absurd and I do not wish to be laughed at."

"Nevertheless," came his answer, "you had better see them. The police are not all fools. I shall see to it that there is an officer there who may surprise you."

Accordingly, as soon as I could get away, I carried my problem to headquarters. A trim man whom I had known for years was sitting at the desk. As I expected he smiled when I told him what I was afraid of.

"H-m!" he said. "Mr. Warren, I am afraid you have allowed your nerves to run away with your reason. Affairs of this kind do not happen in this manner. I have a good knowledge of criminal legerdemain, and history, and I can assure you that such a thing as the King of Thieves is only idle fancy.

"Some hoax most likely. Someone is working to make a fool of you. Better go a little slow. Hold your balance. Don't get excited. And anyway, even granting that there is such a being, he would hardly warn you."

Just here someone coughed and I turned to see that we were not alone. Seated in the corner in the shadow of the room was a heavy, gray-sprinkled individual reading the morning paper, or to be precise, holding one, for he was really looking at us with the expression of one who has just found something that he knew was missing.

At my glance he nodded kindly. I could see that his face was strong, his eyes a gray protean, his mustache heavy but close-cropped and of the gray that seemed to be his predominating color. One could perceive that he was a man who knew no fear and was honor from the very bottom. A rough man, truly, but a good one. He stepped over to us and held his fist upon the desk.

"Pardon me, Mr. Simpson," he said firmly, "but Mr. Warren is right. There is a King of Thieves and this is a case for action."

Simpson eyed him keenly.

"You mean to tell me, Wilkins, as good and as experienced an officer as you are, that you believe that there is such a thing as a King of Thieves?"

"I don't believe it," came the answer, "I know. Though who he is I cannot tell you. But he has acquired his crown in the way every king should get it; through his achievements."

Simpson threw back his head and laughed heartily. Right there I made a mental indictment of our whole police system. We choose out and select some druggist, merchant, blacksmith, or whatever the case may be, and place him at the head of one of the most difficult professions in the world. In a short time he acquires the rules of the routine, to which is added a little experience and after this he becomes cocksure and certain.

This man, with his little training, we pit against the nimble wits of those who all their lives have been waging a war against society. They get the small offenders, the simple and the clumsy; but the big ones, the really dangerous, are likely to slip through their fingers. They say it takes a rogue to catch a rogue. However that may be, it most certainly demands a wonderful proficiency.

A blacksmith does not stand much chance. And Simpson was a blacksmith.

Involuntarily I compared him to George Witherspoon and drew my own conclusions.

But the raillery did not perturb a whit the gray-haired Wilkins.

"Listen, Mr. Simpson," he said. "Two years ago the president of the bank of Dublin received just such a card. Plain and simple 'King of Thieves'; just like this one. He was a good man, the presi-

dent; but like yourself he did not believe in the melodrama. His bank had never lost a cent through robbery. He prided himself that he had an institution so guarded and protected that he was proof against all thievery.

"But he took precautions. He handed the card, as he should have done, over to the police. The place was watched and guarded. And two nights later the vaults were looted for around one hundred thousand. That was not all; the fellow had sent his warning; had almost, you might say, set the time and the minute. But he got away; and he left not a clue behind him.

"It was unparalleled. The police were baffled; and they have remained so to this day. The only tangible evidence they had of his passing was the gold that was missing.

"The man is spectacular in his methods. Right there he earned his title. He is the King of Thieves.

"Then in Sydney. Exactly the same routine. Sixty thousand. In Capetown, one hundred and fifty. Wherever he operates, no matter what the time or place, he gets away with it. His methods are uncanny; he gets what he is after; he delights in opposition. He is a sport and, believe me, he is the King of Thieves. If you can catch him and can hold him you will be twenty thousand richer."

AT THE sound of money and a price like that, Simpson's eyes went to pinpoints. The covetousness of his nature welled up and focused in his vision. I really believe that right there in his mind he spent that twenty thousand; it would take a long time to accumulate that much nailing horse-shoes, or as police chief of our little city. Of course a reward of such proportions made a difference.

The man Wilkins was one trained in the profession: he understood his business, and he had that peculiar wide range of perception which enabled him to grasp the larger problems. The little things with him were left to others: it was the big cases that he tackled.

He was one of those who chose to handle the baffling: and recognized that in crime as in everything else there is such a thing as genius. "Anyone can catch a chicken thief," is the way he put it, "but it requires brains to outwit the Master of his calling."

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"Well," said Mr. Simpson reassuringly, "we shall do our best. Don't worry. We can use that twenty thousand. If your King of Thieves should come and see you we shall be just that much richer."

He had the egotism that is ever peculiar to one who only half knows his business. He was a good man, this Simpson, but he was far and away out of his calling; he was too practical, too short-sighted and not dreamer enough to grasp and comprehend the possibility of such a character as the one of whom we now were talking.

But Wilkins was different. I could see his eyes narrow shrewdly as he sized the other. I know what he was thinking: and that he was a man of action, who could and would do something.

"Yes, Mr. Warren," he said. "We shall do all and to our utmost. Sit tight. I shall take steps immediately. Whether we accomplish our purpose is another matter. We can only do everything that we can do.

"But it will be no child's play, I can assure you. We can use human weapons, and, to be candid, the individual against whom we are pitted is hardly human."

I returned to the bank. Perhaps you have noticed that I was hardly fair with our police chief. In this case, or in any other, for that matter, it was obviously my duty to lay before him all the particulars, of whatsoever nature, that pertained to the case in question. I went to him with this little cardboard of melodrama, with this impossible legend of the King of Thieves. Yet, though I knew that George Witherspoon was the man that we were after; that he and the other were synonymous, I had not told him.

There were two reasons. In the first place, as soon as I talked with Simpson I understood that the case was hopeless. In the second I wished protection more than capture. I considered George Witherspoon not as a criminal, but as a problem; and that he came more in the Master's jurisdiction than in police courts. But I did not wish to be robbed. Hence my visit.

I had not been long in my office before I received a visitor. None other than Mr. Wilkins. Undoubtedly he had something to tell me, which he did not wish to say before the other. I motioned him to a chair and carefully shut the door.

"Now," I smiled, "you have something to tell me: you at least have some faith in this case of the one with the evil title."

"I have."

He did not say more, but quietly—as if it could convince me more than words—placed a little card upon the table.

Wonderingly I picked it up. It was all blocked with sevens.

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"Ah!" I exclaimed. "Then you came from the Master?"

"Exactly."

"Then you know?"

"Certainly."

"The King of Thieves?"

"Is George Witherspoon."

My conscience was allayed. I had now no reason to flay myself for having withheld vital information. This man had come from the House of the Sevens and was undoubtedly in possession of the necessary information. He was a detective; but what was more, he was a member also, of the Order of the Sevens.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE TRAIL OF A SHADOW

I HAD always known that the ramifications of the Master's organization were far reaching; but I had never thought of it as taking in the police. Rather I had considered it as a semioccult cult, with professors, scientists, doctors, *et cetera,* as active members. But perhaps this man was a psychologist as well as a detective. I asked him. A smile is what I received in reply.

"Do I look like a psychologist? All I know about psychology is that it is a word that looks a great deal like a sneeze. No, I am a detective pure and simple. But because I am a detective is no reason why I must believe that man is merely bone and sinew.

"I have always been an optimist when it came to mankind. Years ago I came into contact with the Master. I am not an educated man, in the psychical sense of the term; but when I was told that I could be of some little assistance in the great work I was one of the happiest men on earth. Since that day I have served two masters, human society, as

represented in our institutions, which I protect against malefactors; and the great source of knowledge, the hope and soul of mankind as embodied in the Master and his fellows.

"For I too would know what I am. For years my work has been a cloud of notes and detail: no character is met, no incident is so trivial, but that I report it to the Master. I understand that he has studied human nature, or the human mind if you will, from every conceivable angle. My work has brought me to far places. I have seen many things; I have encountered many strange adventures."

"And just now?"

"I am on the trail of a shadow, he whom the Master calls the Rebel Soul; who is George Witherspoon, the King of Thieves, and I know not what else. For a shadow he surely is. He is the only man on earth whom I could not baffle. This one treats me like a plaything.

"I have followed him to the ends of the earth and backward. Never once have I seen him. He laughs at me. Time and again has he left me a note, where he knew I was sure to call, and informed me of his and my destination. He appears to know my mind just as he does his own.

"For example, in London: 'I am on my way to Boston,' he wrote me. 'Have a little collection that I wish to make. When you read this you will be on your way to Paris. Don't go. Come to Boston. When you arrive you will receive a token of my friendship.' "

"Did you get the token?" I asked.

"Yes. I followed him to Boston. I did not go to Paris as I had intended, though how he knew it was my destination is something I can't make out. I had told nobody, it was only in my mind; no place else.

"As soon as I landed I hastened to my hotel. The clerk there knew me. 'Mr. Wilkins?' he said, 'That's me,' I answered. 'Well,' he said, 'I have a package for you. Man left it; said for me to give it to Mr. Wilkins.' "

"What was it?"

The detective took out his watch and laid it on the table. "This," he said.

I picked it up. It was a splendid, heavy, solid-gold affair. The works were of the most expensive sort. On the front of the case was the letter W.

"Turn it over," said the other, "and read." I did so. On the back of the case was an engraved sentence:

In appreciation of a good, long chase. Keep it up.—K. T.

"And that," announced Wilkins, "is the man I'm after. And that is the man that his nibs"—pointing toward police headquarters contemptuously with his thumb—"imagines he can take by simply going out and placing his hand upon his shoulder and saying, 'You're mine.' "

"And the collection?" I asked.

"Rathbone—Cornelius Rathbone. Do you know him?"

Know him! What man had not heard of Cornelius Rathbone, the most unscrupulous, the most successful, the most merciless man in modern finance. I had understood that he had encountered enormous losses, was enmeshed in a maze of scandal, and had committed suicide. His career I had often cited as an example that no fortune that is not based on honor can be permanent. That Witherspoon had had any connection with his downfall I had not dreamed.

"Is it possible?"

"Possible! Not only possible, but a fact. He ruined him; drove him to the wall; played ducks and drakes with him; wound him in a mesh that he could not unravel; showed him up; disgraced him; cleaned him. When he was through with Rathbone the old thief did not have a thing on earth to make life worth living. His wife had left him; his son was expelled from college in disgrace; his daughter had eloped. When I arrived in Boston, the old rogue had gone the gas route. Witherspoon had collected."

REALLY, as far as I was concerned, I had very little sympathy for the financier. He had always been the savage in the ranks of finance. When the report came of his death, I am afraid that I, like many others, had breathed a little easier.

What startled me was that Witherspoon had been the one to free us. He appeared to be getting closer to us, nearer to the earth, more tangible and solid. He had done with Rathbone what all the serried ranks of honest finance had failed to do; and he had done it quickly. I strummed on the table with my fingers.

"How do you account for it?" I asked.

The detective spread his hands.

"I don't account for it. I've quit accounting. All I do is watch. When this man strikes it is with the speed of the lightning; he is sure and certain; he never fails.

"Rathbone he got in the market. Where, as I understood, all others had failed, he walked in, pulled the financial structure down upon his ears, and left him in the ruins."

"Well," I commented, "if he always attacks men of just such moral caliber, he may, after all, do good instead of evil. A rich man may often free himself in the law courts by retaining lawyers; he can never get away from ethics—which means, in a nutshell, plain, downright right and wrong. Ethics has brought this man to retribution. For that let us give Witherspoon just one good mark of credit."

The gray eyes of the other lit up strangely. There was a flicker in them that spoke of admiration.

"Mr. Warren," he said, "I have been after him for a good long time; he is a criminal and a thief—the most baffling man I have ever followed. But"—he slapped his hand upon the table so that the smack resounded, then continued softly—"he never cleaned up a man nor an institution that did not need the cleaning.

"I have arrived at the point where I admire him. He goes through the world, picks out the big rogues, stands them on their heads, and loots them. He beats them at any game they tackle. Never has he robbed a poor man, nor an honest one, nor a woman; it is the big, fat, crooked fish that he is after."

I smiled at this; it did me perceptible good to hear at last one good word spoken of my former playmate; and even more so from the lips of his sworn antagonist, whose pursuit was unrelenting. That the man was a thief and a criminal there was no doubt, and for that there was no pardon; but he was something more than a mortal sinner. From the words and wisdom I had seeped in from the Master, I was certain, no, positive, that here was not a mere sinner, but something far above it.

Nevertheless, I was human; and for all his powers I could not understand how any man could so completely and with such impunity evade all the vigilance of the authorities. When one understands all the powers of the police and the immense and delicate web that is spun over the earth for the protection of society, one can hardly conceive of any malefactor continuing long without touching one of the threads that sound alarm.

According to Wilkins, his work was bold and open, and yet, by the same implication, he had continued unmolested. It was hardly credible, hardly possible, even though I knew him. And so I told the detective.

"How is it," I asked, "that a man can do all that you say without rousing all the vigilance of all the safe-guarders of our welfare? Surely the police are watching faithfully enough; they must know him; it must be impossible that he can do all this and still be open."

"You forget, Mr. Warren, that I serve two masters. In this case I take my orders from *our* Master. I received my instructions long ago. They were explicit: 'Find this man and take him; bring him to me. But do not allow the police to lay their hands upon him. If they do, a great crime will be committed. This is not a case for the law courts.' "

"I see," I answered. "And you have worked alone?"

"Exactly. That is, until lately. Recently, however, my orders were amended. To use the Master's words: 'Take him any way you can. From what I know now, it is certain that they cannot hold him. I want to see what happens.' "

"Do you know," I asked, "that George Witherspoon was once the prosecuting attorney of this city?"

Wilkins eyed me shrewdly, his eyes narrowing to little slits. He turned over a book that was on the table.

"I know all," he said impressively. "I know who was the prosecuting attorney. I know even"—still with his eyes on me—"yes, even that. From what I know, I would say that the man is the devil. But the Master says he is not; and the Master knows.

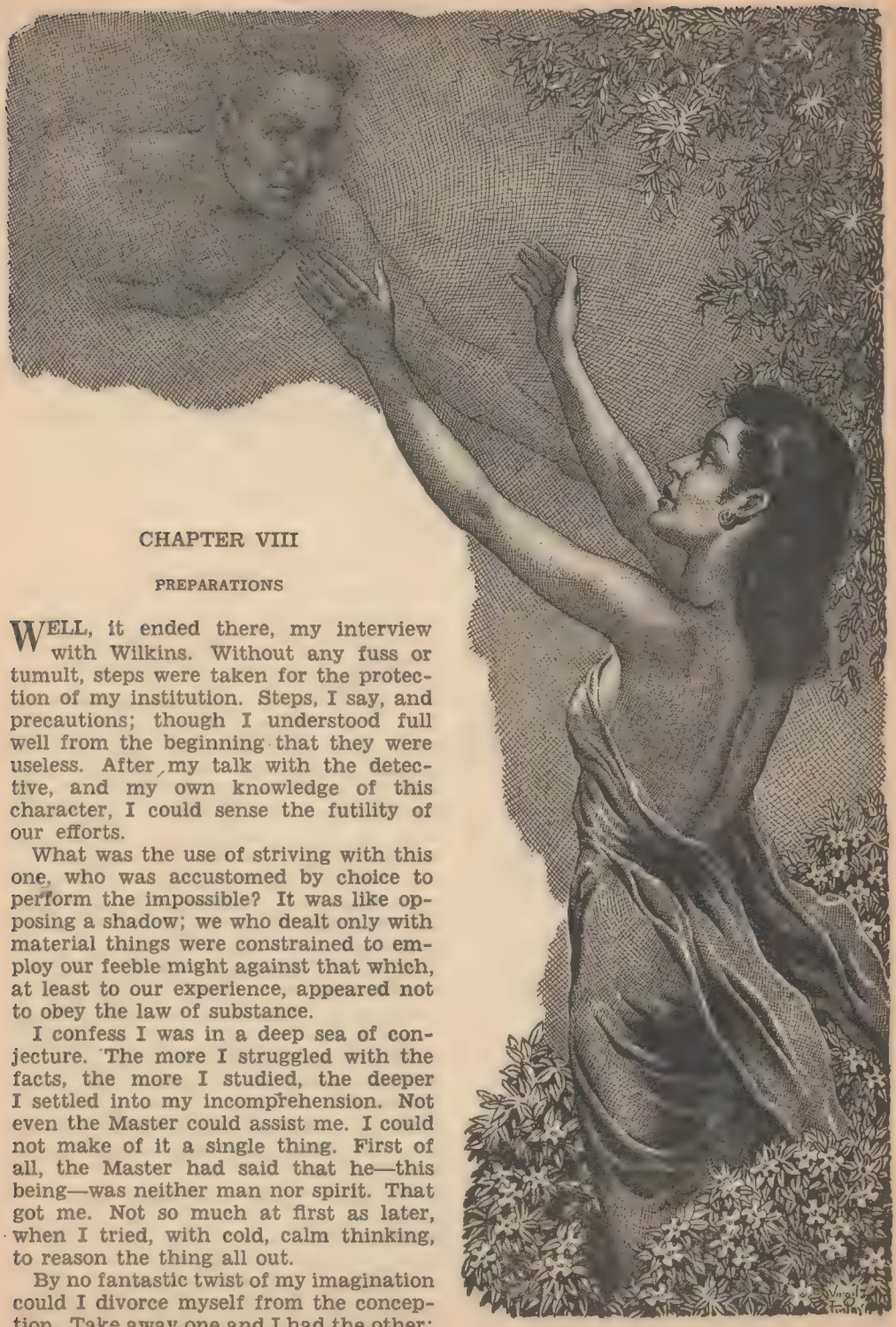
"Certainly it is no case for the law courts. Therefore I have worked alone. The police are jumbled. Each job that he has committed has been complete in itself. Outside of the spectacular bank robberies there has been no way of linking a connection. He leaves no clues whatever. I of all those connected with the legal machinery know the man that I am after."

"But," I exclaimed, "you have never seen him!"

"Bray has; in London. The Master knows him; and you."

"Does anyone suspect that this character is George Witherspoon, once prosecuting attorney of this city?"

"Not a soul on earth."



"He is coming to me! Swiftly he is coming!"

CHAPTER VIII

PREPARATIONS

WELL, it ended there, my interview with Wilkins. Without any fuss or tumult, steps were taken for the protection of my institution. Steps, I say, and precautions; though I understood full well from the beginning that they were useless. After my talk with the detective, and my own knowledge of this character, I could sense the futility of our efforts.

What was the use of striving with this one, who was accustomed by choice to perform the impossible? It was like opposing a shadow; we who dealt only with material things were constrained to employ our feeble might against that which, at least to our experience, appeared not to obey the law of substance.

I confess I was in a deep sea of conjecture. The more I struggled with the facts, the more I studied, the deeper I settled into my incomprehension. Not even the Master could assist me. I could not make of it a single thing. First of all, the Master had said that he—this being—was neither man nor spirit. That got me. Not so much at first as later, when I tried, with cold, calm thinking, to reason the thing all out.

By no fantastic twist of my imagination could I divorce myself from the conception. Take away one and I had the other; take away the other and I had the one. And there it left me. There was no

classification else that I could go to. I could not make of it a thing at all; it was all past me.

Then George Witherspoon. I recalled his visit; his coming on the trail of the storm and lightning, like the incarnation of another being riding the stars of distance. There was something spectral about his presence, something illusive, almost unearthly.

Somehow, when I recalled him, I was ready to concede almost anything. And yet the man had implored me. I remember the tenderness of his voice when he had spoken, the appeal he had made for assistance. Assistance! How was I, or anyone else so helpless, to assist him? How marvelous were his powers; how easily had he cured our little Georgie.

He had bestowed a pledge of friendship —pledge that was almost priceless. Why the pledge when he had given warning? He was on his merciless way, even now, for my destruction. He loved me. Why was his hatred so enduring? I who had done nothing but good to him all my lifetime?

I confess that it was incomprehensible. I had the feeling that I was helpless, that I was drifting supinely with the tide of the irresistible.

I communicated my feelings to the Master. As usual, of course, he cheered me; though when I came to analyze his words, I could not see much encouragement.

"Walter," he said, "do not be worried. You have a destiny to fulfill. Whatever will be, will be. A few thousand dollars one way or the other is merely nothing. If you are to be robbed, so be it; we can only take human precautions.

"It is not the robbery that concerns us so much as what may follow. He may be captured. For the first time Wilkins is ahead of him. I have instructed him to use the police. Not that I think that the police can hold him, but that I wish to learn what happens when he is taken."

I went to Wilkins.

"Sure," he shrugged; "you're going to be cleaned, just as sure as shooting. This chap is too uncanny. I'm an almighty good detective, Warren; but I'm no spirit. I can only do what's human and obey orders. For myself, I shall feel wonderfully well rewarded if I get one look at this chap, just to see what he is like."

A splendid prospect truly. I confess that I was a banker more than anything else, and that I valued money. I could philosophize as well as any other when it could be done without broken bank-vaults. I was more deeply immured in this mystery than any other, and was proportionally interested in its solving; but I did not wish to have my institution —the bank that was my very being— ruined. The only individual who was at all encouraging was Simpson. When he called, he would stretch his bulk out luxuriously in my office. "Nothing to it, Mr. Warren; nothing could be nicer. The thing's all cut and dried, sir. We have received our notice, and our man is on the way and we are waiting. By the way, what would be a good investment for that twenty thousand?"

NOTHING happened. It wore along toward Christmas; our great annual affair, the one ball that outdid all others, was approaching. Like all cities of any size at all, we had a certain class who constituted, as it were, the upper ten among us. This was their special function.

Of course it was provincial; but with us it had the importance that all such affairs attain in little places. Though we could not hope to rival our larger cities, we went out of our way to make it a night of splendor.

I did not care much for dancing; the experiences through which I had endured had sapped the nimbleness from my bones and sinews. The buoyancy, the light-hearted exuberance that is the flashing light of youth-time, was entirely missing. But I could enjoy the music, and could delight in seeing others happy.

And then, too, there was Roselle, who was all aflutter. Dancing means so much to a maiden, and she was so much the butterfly in her make-up. Clara and I had always attended, and now that we had Roselle, it was not for us to stay away from the happiness of the evening.

To be sure I had my troubles, and was burdened down with the weight of a fate impending. But I did not allow that to hinder. Why should I? I had carefully, solicitously shielded them from all knowledge and worry of the developments that I have stated.

The incident of the cards had been forgotten. Surely, for the sake of my loved ones, I could spare one night to happiness and love and dancing.

I hardly need to relate to you the happenings of the week preceding. It was important visits to exclusive shops, new slippers, wraps and what not.

I had only a dress-suit to don, a linen collar, some cuff buttons, which my wife would find for me when the time came, a few other twists and capers, through which I had gone with exactly the same evolution since I was old enough to wear long trousers, and I was ready. That is all that a man must do. Half the pleasure of an affair is—with the women—in anticipation. We lose all that. We have only one night; our wives have seven—one night dancing and six nights making ready.

Of course you can see by this that we were provincial, my wife and I. We had wealth, position, education, and good breeding; but we were not snobbish. I was a millionaire, and my father had been one before me; but I lived much like my parents. We were home folks, pure and simple, myself and Clara. The servants who had served my folks were still with us; and they were not many. We preferred above all things to be alone with our little family.

Of course we could have displayed all the garish and haughty pomp that goes with sudden millions. But we were beyond that. We were accustomed from our very breeding to the feel of money, and so held to simplicity, ideality, and home-life as the things to be attained to.

And so, in such a town, and in such a family, the affair took on the importance that it did. My women folks made much ado over it, and spent the week in the suppressed excitement of making ready; while I, as usual, occupied the time with my business, my routine affairs, and the precautions which I had taken to safeguard my trust and property from depredation.

In truth, this last was just at present my principal occupation. I had the thoroughness of my father, and I left nothing undone that would conduce in the slightest degree to safety. The bank was guarded inside and out by watchmen; the place became a veritable hive of detectives.

Secretly, unostentatiously, so as to attract no notice, the place was so watched and shielded that it seemed impossible that anyone, no matter who he might be, could gain any ingress whatever. I am afraid that to some of those whom I had retained, my zeal and caution seemed a little bit overstrained. But they did not know what I did—that I was dealing with one who, in his working and uncanniness, was the equal almost of the devil.

Two men, and two men only, understood the worthiness of our opponent—Wilkins and the Master. They assumed control and waited, quietly, eagerly, fearingly, for the onslaught that they knew was coming. On the afternoon preceding the ball, the Master called up from the city.

"Is this you, Walter?" he asked quietly, when I answered his call. "Yes? Well, is Mr. Wilkins there? Would you please call him to the phone?"

As it happened, the other was just then in my office. I called him over and handed him the receiver. "The Master," I said.

"Yes," he answered. "This is Wilkins. Is this the Master? You wish to talk to me?"

I could hear them both from where I was sitting. The Master's voice was wonderfully distinct.

"Ah, this is Wilkins. I want you this night to redouble your vigilance. Be careful. Do not let a thing escape you. Not a thing. I understand that there is to be a ball over there. All of George Witherspoon's former friends will be in attendance. We can look for something

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spectacular. He is nothing if not dramatic. I think that we can fully count on this as the night on which he makes his depredation."

"Tonight," Wilkins nodded to me significantly. I could see the glint of satisfaction in his eyes at the thought of action.

"YES, tonight," the Master went on. "It is a question whether we stop him. In fact, I am afraid that we are powerless; however, we shall have some manifestation of his weird reality. Don't be disappointed if he goes through you like a shadow. Just do your best to hold him.

"And, by the way, you might give Simpson the place of honor. Let him guard the vaults. Explain the situation to him. He is hungry for that twenty thousand, and he may put up a good fight to grasp it.

"Now, don't worry, Wilkins; just do your best, and I shall not hold it against you if your best proves failure. This is not a case of mere criminality. I realize with what tools you are working. I would like to speak to Mr. Warren."

I picked up the phone.

"Yes?"

"Walter, I am asking you tonight to forget that you ever were a banker. Go to the ball. Be as near a boy again as you can be. Under no circumstances come near your bank. Leave that to us. I am looking for developments.

"Remember that our main purpose is not to save a little money, but to save George Witherspoon. I am sure you are as much interested in that as I am. I am coming over immediately. I shall be at the bank. If anything happens I shall phone you. Watch the dancers. And above all watch Roselle! She is in greater danger a thousandfold than all your money!

"And listen"—he was speaking slowly and calmly—"remember, Walter, do not get excited; and above all things—now listen—do not keep Roselle away from the dancing. Remember what I said—that what must be, must be. We must follow things to their conclusion.

"If anything happens, phone me; I shall be at the bank. Now remember, easy, be as buoyant as you can; keep your eyes open, and watch Roselle, and be prepared for anything that may happen."

That was all. Slowly I hung up the receiver, like one whose mentality had suddenly been deadened and flattened by the weight of the load that had been thrust upon it. Through my brain were flashing the staccatoed vista of fluttering thoughts and repetitions. Money, George Witherspoon, Roselle, and dancers, conclusions, buoyancy, developments—each thought striving with insistent clamor to make vivid its own impression, depriving me for the moment of all power of action.

Wilkins noticed it and smiled understandingly; he had heard, even as I had when he was talking, the words of the Master.

"Some problem, eh?" he commented. "Collect yourself, Mr. Warren; take it easy. One thing at a time, you know. Forget all the rest, and concentrate on having a good time. I wish I could go at my end of it that way. The more I stay with this case, the more it gets me. But we shall win out, never worry.

"The Master is the wisest old head in Christendom. Never once when I followed his advice has it failed me. Just do as he says, concentrate on his words, and leave the rest to us. Go to the ball; have a good time; whoop 'er up, and forget that you ever had any money. Tomorrow we may all be wiser."

There was a great deal in what he said. To be sure, I was a banker and a man of position, and with my nature it was hardly likely that I would portion myself out a good time by "whooping 'er up," as he called it. Nevertheless, it seemed right that I should gather myself together, and obey the Master's instructions. And if I was to do this, there was no time to begin like the present.

Accordingly I had a last cursory look into my affairs and into the precautions that had been effected for my protection, and departed. It was not an easy thing for one as set and settled as I was; but I resolved to steel myself into obeying implicitly the instructions which I had received.

The Master had once before saved me from the greatest peril of my lifetime. I could trust him. I realized that in his and Wilkins's, my case was in the ablest hands that I could hope for.

CHAPTER IX

"HE IS COMING"

WHAT a contrast—all this suspense and apprehension of the unknown

impending—to the atmosphere of my home. There all was animation. Roselle was just in that full-blooded bloom of her girlhood when everything was laughter, every intonation of her voice was music, and the sunshine of a happy spirit exuded all about her.

She was all anticipation, light hearted, and of that fresh, tender, feminine beauty that to the masculine is so alluring. It was impossible to be a gloom around her. She took my face in her two pretty hands and kissed me.

"Dear old sober business man," she chided. "You are going to be a boy again tonight, aren't you? Tonight we are to dance, laugh, and be merry. I shall reserve your dances on my program. And I shall hold you to every one. Now you go up to your room and get ready."

I laughed and obeyed her. She had a way of always coddling me into good humor. In true married style I made ready for the evening. When Clara had arranged my tie, straightened my sleeves, and attended to a dozen and one details that my poor unfashionable mind would not have noticed, I returned, to pass the muster of the girl's inspection.

"Just like a beau," she bantered; "just like a beau. Were it not for Clara, I am sure that I would steal you."

With her clatter and happiness and the spirit that she emitted, I found it easier to obey the Master's instructions than I had expected. I sank into the freedom of the evening with abandon, shutting my eyes, as it were, to all thoughts of my business. To be sure, I had a vague trepidation that would not be stifled; but I forced it, partly through will, and a great measure through her cheering contact, as far back into the corners of my mind as possible.

Not that I forgot for a moment Roselle or the dancers. I was acutely curious as to the events impending, and examined with exaggerated minuteness each single shade and detail. Nevertheless, I forced myself into a degree of jollity that to me was far from normal. I was, as it were, in the same state of mind as he who spends his last penny without a thought of the morrow—a wise spendthrift, who left in wiser hands than his own the developments that he knew he could not handle!

The ball itself was like all others; there is a similarity about all balls that is very much like a circus—the crowd is the thing that distinguishes and the music. When you say a ball's a ball, you have said it. The usual December crowd was in attendance; young men just home from college; freshmen, conceited with their new status; jolly sophomores, sedate and wise young seniors; prosperous and exaggeratedly important young business men; plus a whole bevy of wonderfully pretty girls, about whom the others fluttered like bees about so much honey.

There was the sibilant fête of dancing, music, laughter, and the thrill that ever comes with the mingling of the sexes. When youth and beauty meet in pleasure, the blood is sure to tingle. We of the older set, matrons and benedicks, gave the affair just the proper balance.

There was ever about an affair such as this which brought me recollections. It bore me back to the days of my youth-time—even as you and all of us must revert to the friends and the undying joys of our spring-time. I could never forbear the vision that transcended. Of the music and the dancing, the joys of other days, of George Witherspoon, and all the others.

Many of them were with us now, grown up and settled, prosperous men and women of the older set. And I could not but wonder where he was, the brightest light among them. Where was George, the old playmate of my childhood?

The Master had instructed me to watch the dancers. I scrutinized them carefully one by one for a single sign or message. But in all that assemblage there was not a single one that was like him.

Not that handsome men were missing, or athletes; of splendid, clean young men there were many, but that there was lacking in every one that combination of the suberb and splendid that was so dazzling.

He was so unlike all others that there was no mistaking. George Witherspoon was not among us.

But there was one who did attract attention—the young man with whom Roselle was dancing, a strong lad of handsome features, clean cut, and with the poise and carriage that told of athletics. I learned shortly that he was an All-American football player of the season just preceding, and the man who had won the amateur championship of boxing in our colleges.

Certainly his physique was splendid. He was taller than George Witherspoon

by probably half a head, broader and more powerful, and of easy poise and carriage. A type of young man whose body is not only a heritage of birth, but the product of long years of careful training as well. But he was not the other; as he passed me I glanced into his eyes and understood it; they were blue, good-natured, simple, the eyes of a soul that is placid. He might have been an athlete and all that, and a boxer as well; but his was not that consuming flame of energy that would welcome the death-grip of the devil. Evidently a great, good-hearted young man, and kindly. From the attention that he was bestowing upon Roselle it was manifest that his feelings were passing through mere friendship, and ripening into that state that passes into affection.

THE first part of the evening wore away. Strange to relate, I was happier and lighter hearted than I had been in a long time. Of course I was not old, only in my thirties; but for the past few years, owing to what had happened, I was worn down, not only in body, but in spirit. Why I was so full of life during this interval is a little beyond comprehension.

Still, I did not mind it; I could have shut out the world and gone on thus forever, I was so contented. Perhaps it was Roselle; it may have been the injunction of the Master, or again it may have been one of those indefinable ways that Fate has when she leads us to delusion. Disaster has a way of masking all her movements. My ecstasy was to have a sudden breaking.

I was dancing with Roselle when the first tinkling premonition came; and it was not myself that first received it. We were gliding over the floor in time to the swelling music, weaving ourselves about to the rhythmic melody, and thrilling to the ecstatic poetry of feeling that the mellow flow of the waltz was flooding through the ballroom.

It came just like that; it was just that sudden. One minute she was laughing, the next she had stopped weakly, and her rosy cheeks were pallid; for a moment I thought that she had fainted, she grew so heavy in my arms.

"What is it?" I asked, bewildered.

"Oh," she answered weakly; "please take me to a seat. I feel so queerly. There. Some water."

In a moment I had fetched it, and she drank it. Others, noticing, flocked about her, solicitously anxious for her comfort. But it passed just as suddenly as it had come.

"No," she said. "I feel better. I am all right now. I—it was the strangest feeling. I— Where is Cousin Walter? Ah—Walter, please escort me outside." Then to the others: "Oh, I am all right now."

"What is it, Roselle?" I asked, when we were outside the ballroom.

She put her hand upon my arm and clutched it tightly, so tightly that I am sure the imprint of her pretty fingers were embedded.

"Walter," she questioned softly, "did you see it? Did you see nothing? Tell me!"

"Really, Roselle," I answered. "I do not understand you. What is it? Tell me! What? Who was it?"

For a moment she gazed up at me, her great, dark eyes full of wonder, as if unable to understand that I, too, had not seen this thing that had flashed across her fancy.

"Who was it?" I repeated. "Who was it?"

She nodded her head emphatically, and her lips moved mechanically, as if she reverenced the words she uttered.

"George Witherspoon!"

"George Witherspoon?"

"Yes. He is coming. I saw him. He is coming swiftly. Oh, Walter, I cannot understand it."

We were quite alone.

I have a faint recollection of the furnishings, of palm-leaves, of flowers in profusion, and the music mellowing from the ballroom. And most of all I remember this girl of Spanish beauty who looked up to me almost as a father.

Not for all the world would I have a single harm come to her. How superbly beautiful was her face in the half-light, her eyes glowing, mysterious, deep, appealing to mine in question. Fearfully, in full rush, I recalled the words of the Master: "Watch Roselle."

CHAPTER X

THE LOOTING OF THE BANK

I HELD her in my arms.

"Tell me, Roselle, tell me truly. Is it—do you love him?"

She settled closer, nestled to me as if

she were giving up her very spirit. The words she spoke were scarcely more than a whisper; but they were the most golden words a woman ever uttered, the talisman of a soul's surrender.

"Oh," she breathed, "Walter. More than my life. More than my life."

What could I do? No more than you or any other. I petted and reassured her.

"There, there," I told her. "It will all come right. Don't worry. It was only a fancy. And even if it were not it should not interfere with your pleasure of the evening. You are feeling better, are you not? The music has stopped; our dance is over."

So it was. And the girl, taking my arm, went with me back to the ballroom.

"Walter," she said, "you good old dear, forgive me. I am better now. It did seem imperative I should tell you. It was such a strange, strange feeling. I know that you understand me. It was like a wave; but now I feel just as gay as ever."

Just the same, as I left her an icy chill descended; my spirit sogged with the dampness of premonition. My heart was overworking under the stress of apprehension.

I recalled that I had heard no word from the Master; he had promised that he would call me if anything should happen. I had obeyed orders implicitly. Until now, not a call had I received from the watchers. I endeavored to reassure myself; to loosen the clutch of my worry. Just then a hand upon my shoulder.

"Mr. Warren. Telephone."

Mechanically I followed; and like a wooden man picked up the receiver.

"Hello."

I could hear voices at the other end, several, talking together excitedly; incoherent, indistinct; then a voice rasping over the wire:

"Hello! Hello! I want Mr. Warren. Are you going to be forever!"

"This is Mr. Warren."

"Oh. This is Mr. Warren? Hold the wire. Hold it. Just a minute." Then I could hear him shouting: "Hey, Wilkins, all right, here's Mr. Warren." Then Wilkins's voice. "In a moment."

"Hello, Mr. Warren." His voice was cold and steady, like that of a survivor of preordained disaster. No more words were necessary to convey his message. Nevertheless, I answered:

"Well, Mr. Wilkins?" I was ready. Somehow, now that it was over, I did not care; I merely wanted to hear the confirmation. His voice came.

"Well, it's done. The bank's been looted from top to bottom. He went through us like a spirit. It was the weirdest thing that ever happened. Put us all to sleep. Every man jack of us at his leisure. Went through the place as though he owned it.

"He gets me. And say, you ought to see what he did to Simpson. You know the chief had the place of honor. Well, after this King of Thieves, Rebel Soul, or whatever you wish to call him, had gone through the vaults, he made a sign and pinned it on Simpson. For that alone I can almost forgive him. It read: 'Some detective!' Simpson is crazy mad!"

"You say you were all asleep?" I asked. "Where was the Master? Was *he* asleep?"

"I don't know. He was in your office. Really, to be honest with you, I have an idea that the old fox was wide awake and watching. Here he comes now. Hold the wire—he wishes to speak to you."

"Walter?"

"Yes."

"It is over. This is one part. Now comes your part. Watch Roselle. Watch the dancers. Be calm and easy. And, Walter, do not, as you value your life, enter into any struggle. Keep yourself to one side; notice everything; take notes."

With that he hung up. I returned to the ballroom. I had a dance with Clara, and I knew that she was waiting. I must confess that my nerves were shaken, and no doubt I was pallid with the fear that was upon me.

I could hardly swallow; my mouth seemed sticky. I was no coward, but I had a wholesome dread of the George Witherspoon, who was the Rebel Soul. I knew that he had no pity; and I knew that he would do whatever work he had to do in that ballroom just as sure as there will be the crack of doomsday.

My wife noticed my emotion at once.

"What—what is it, Walter? What in the world has happened? Tell me."

I HAVE a vague recollection of the room, of the decorations of clumps of mistletoe, of holly, of dancers gliding all about, of entrancing, subtle music flooding through the air, and of bright lights gleaming. When I look back now I can ever see the scene; it is one of the vivid

spots of life's creation. And I remember my apprehensive glance over the room to find Roselle and my reassurance when I saw her dancing.

But just then my wife touched my arm; a telephonic touch of fear and warning; there was something about it that startled my heart into leaping, like the clanging of a bell; but her words startled even more so.

"Look, Walter, who is here!"

Standing at the lower end of the hall was George Witherspoon!

I shall never forget that moment—the fear, the wonder, the admiration. He was in evening dress, his blond, wavy hair combed neatly; as young-looking as if he were twenty; erect, graceful, and at ease. There was no mistaking; he it was and no other.

Though I feared him, though I dreaded, though I knew that he had no mercy, I could not for all that suppress an exclamation of admiration. Surely such beauty was never before given to a mortal; it was a thing past all defining, radiating, magnetic, alluring beyond human understanding. He was the perfection of human physique, plus beauty, plus all embellishments of the unknown that held him. But he was not my playmate; a glance sent a quiver through my heart like a poisoned arrow.

He was the Rebel Soul!

Calmly he stood there, not moving a single muscle, a smile upon his features, the same old cheeriness that had ever been his birthright, the same disposition that had given him always the van in every pleasure. I could not but wonder at the paradox of his seeming, he who was all sin and shadow should be such a one of brightness. Surely he was the last one in the world one would suspect as a criminal. And yet he was but just now freshly come from the looting.

He was an outcast, the King of Thieves, hunted by the police of all the world. A flood of emotion surged through me; thoughts, remembrances, repetitions, recollections, and sensations; love, hatred, scorn; everything he had been since the happy days of our childhood; the words of the Master. "Neither man nor spirit." And the warning. "I may kill you. I love you. Fear me, and watch yourself. Save me."

Was there ever anything so impossible, so tangled, so paradoxical, as my position? Even now he was here bent, perhaps, on murder. What was I to do?

His presence was creating comment. There were many in the hall who knew him, and I am sure there was many a feminine heart that fluttered; choked at the recollections that he was recalling; sweethearts of bygone days. I could perceive it in their faces, in their eyes, and in the buzz of comment. It was his nature to be forever in the whirlpool.

And there were other things. The affair, as I have stated, was exclusive. Though we were not, perhaps, on the plane of the select of larger cities, we were nevertheless proud and punctilious as to the formalities of our occasions. Every one in the room knew the cloud that was upon him; not as much as I, to be sure, but enough that for years he had been sought by the police of our city. Until he had cleared his reputation he had no standing.

One of those in authority came over to where I was standing.

"Mr. Warren, is that not George Witherspoon?"

I sensed his meaning, and I sensed the implication; also his intention. In the heart of me I knew just what would happen; that Witherspoon, no matter what this man's authority, would remain where he was if he wished it.

"It is."

He did not reply to me, but turned and started for the other, and I could hear the words that he was speaking—"gall, nerve, assurance," and others to the same purport.

"Look," said Clara, "he is going to put him out."

I smiled, knowing the man's impotence, but said nothing. To one who understood so well, who had had experience, who was, as it were, initiated into the mystery of George's being, such a thing was impossible.

Nevertheless I watched him with a heart of interest as he threaded among the dancers. At last he came up to him. I saw George Witherspoon turn suddenly, look at the man and say something. What that was I never knew; but it set him laughing, then I could see them shaking hands. In a moment more they were talking.

It was done deftly, softly, easily; it was the old trick from his boyhood—speak, laugh, and have his way. There was no opposing.

My wife was frankly disappointed. She

feared him; dreaded him as she did no other; he was the pet bugaboo of her dreams; she was under the unending apprehension that he would be my destruction. She had declared that he was the devil. And knowing what she did, it was difficult, indeed, to bring forth arguments to disprove it.

Not even the healing of little George could accomplish it. It had only deepened her conviction. The whole affair had been so unearthly, so removed from all experience; the setting, the apparition, and the cure itself, that it could not have been anything but the supernatural.

Is it any wonder that she dreaded the present moment; that she clung to me, and with a face that was white and stricken begged me to leave the ballroom before it was too late?

But at that very moment he perceived us. Even from the distance I could discern his triumph and satisfaction. In spite of the music I was certain that I could distinguish his old laugh of mockery. He spoke to his companion and nodded in our direction. The other moved his head in affirmation.

And Clara saw it also. In her terror she clutched me, and in a frightened voice endeavored to persuade me.

"They are coming over to us! You are in danger! Do not remain here! You know what he is. Go, go, at once!"

CHAPTER XI

THE REBEL SOUL APPEARS AGAIN

SHE was so insistent that she would have thrust me forcibly out of the building had she been able. But not for all the world would I have obeyed her. Had it been her safety it would have been different. I am one of those who, although not demonstrative, will do anything for the protection of their loved ones.

In this case, however, I had not my own peril to think of. And I did not think. Rather I remembered the injunctions of the Master. They flashed across my consciousness clear and crackling, holding me to my purpose in defiance of all danger. "Stay. Keep out of conflict, watch Roselle, I am coming."

After all I did have a loved one who demanded my protection. It was clearly my duty to remain. Nevertheless I will confess that I was breathing a cowardly, beseeching prayer for the Master.

If we had visions that he would devour us we were mistaken. He came straight to us and thrust out his hand.

"Well, well, Walter," is how he greeted.

And for the life of me I could not but grasp the extended hand. "How is Walter?" One would have thought from the effusion that he was the best friend I had on earth, instead of the one who had been my ruin.

"And Clara," bowing.

But leave it to a woman! She clutched her gown and drew back as if addressed by a serpent. But he did not notice. Instead he laughed. There was that in his laughter that was always winning. His eyes danced with amusement; there was the same old mirth and jollity that made them so distinctive, every wrinkle and dimple of his handsome face was allurement.

"Well, Walter, are you not tickled to death to see me?"

I was, and yet I wasn't. At the moment I would have given all the world had he been another; had he been himself, the playmate of my boyhood. For I had confidence that the old George Witherspoon was not evil. As he stood before me he was sin incarnate, no matter how alluring. The words of the Master came back to me: "Neither man nor spirit." I could not but study. What was he? Nevertheless I answered:

"George, I am glad to see you."

And then I knew that he was mocking; that he had come to throw his evil deeds in my face and taunt me. For his manner altered.

"Walter," he said, "I could not resist this little visit. I love you; don't you remember our old affection? You were becoming too prosperous; you were growing wealthy. Therefore I have given you a little manifestation of my esteem. I have robbed you."

Was there ever such effrontery? To rob a man and then come and tell him! And to mock him!

I eyed him coldly.

"George," I answered, "please don't go farther. I know it all."

He laughed. "Really. I did not know that you were so far-sighted. Perhaps you can enlighten me as to my present objective."

I don't know why, but until that instant the terrible truth did not dawn

upon me. It was almost as if the flashing currents of his mind had told me. My heart sickened.

"No, no," I exclaimed; "not that! Not—"

"Certainly," he laughed back, "just that. I have come for Roselle."

My mind went streaming back. When I had seen him, the old George Witherspoon, with her in the hallway, I was happy. Now he was the Rebel Soul; he should not have her. The antagonism of my nature welled up in me. I focused my answer with decision.

"You cannot have her. The police will be here in a moment. You are lost!"

Never shall I forget the look he gave me; the wonder, the scorn, the derision. His shoulders shook with the mirth that was upon him.

"Poor, poor Walter, I pity your simplicity."

Now all this, though it takes time in telling, happened in a few short moments. Though he had excited comment at his first appearance, he was now, owing to the retired spot in which we were standing, in some seclusion. This I regarded as fortunate. If I could detain him there for a few moments, and Roselle would remain away, the police would have a chance to arrive.

Clara had slipped away. A covert glance through the doorway revealed her whereabouts. She was telephoning. Help would arrive in a moment.

Another dance was in progress — a waltz—and through the bower of evergreen decorations behind which we were standing we could watch the softly gowned young women gliding by in a flow of colors. There were pinks and azures, blues and purples, and all the many delicate and mothlike blendings.

Among them I watched eagerly for the rose-gowned figure of Roselle. I recalled that I had not noticed her on the floor since the startling appearance of this one I dreaded. Perhaps she was not there. Perhaps fate might be kind enough to keep them apart until the coming of the Master. In a few short moments at the most would come assistance. The police were surely on the way.

He had not said a thing about her absence. He apparently was certain of the ground he stood on. The old assurance, the old confidence, the old certainty of purpose was evidently as strong as ever. I sensed it. I realized the wonderful way he had of willing, of twisting, as it were, the volitions of the future to his desire and purpose. I had the feeling that even now he had foreordained just what would happen. The fact that Roselle was missing perturbed him not a whit.

So we stood there. I with a beating heart, praying for the seconds, and he with the nonchalant smile of certainty, watching the passing dancers.

The vast gulf between our natures could not have been defined more clearly than it was in that single moment. I, all trepidation, hoping, fearing, breathless, praying in a frenzy of heart-choking anxiety for any turn of luck or providence that would assist me. He all assurance, confidence, certainty, waiting on the future which he had commanded. I was weak, puny, nervous; he strong, healthy, confident. Was there ever a greater contrast? And we had once been as brothers.

SUDDENLY his face lighted, his eyes grew bright. I followed his glance to the end of the ballroom. Roselle was just coming through the doorway. With her was the young athlete I have already mentioned. They hesitated a second, said something, and then were gliding out among the dancers. George Witherspoon turned toward me.

"Well, Walter, I don't suppose you will grudge me a little dance with Roselle?"

He laughed, and I noticed that mockery, perhaps owing to anticipation, was entirely missing. Just the same it was with a twinge of satisfaction that I gave my answer.

"I think, George, that her program is full."

"Oh," he said, "I see." And his eyes twinkled in their mischief; he was manifestly amused at one so simple as to regard the rights of others.

I did not answer; in a blur of excitement I watched the doorway; Roselle and her partner were sweeping toward us. His manner, and my knowledge of what he was, was such that I could expect most anything. Had he been like other men it would have been different. But he was not. I realized and dreaded my impotence.

I understood full well what a little being I really was, and how, when the time came, he would whiff me aside as

a piece of insignificance. I could not fight him; I could not oppose; I dreaded him. Oh, for the presence of the Master!

Had I any doubt as to the power of his personality the incident that followed would have quashed it. When Roselle and her partner were abreast of us, he stepped out on the floor and touched them. The girl was surprised and wide-eyed at the suddenness of his presence; her partner looked up questioningly for the meaning of the interruption. It was all done quietly; George Witherspoon merely touched him.

"Better go sit it out, Bub. You seem to be getting tired."

Was there ever such effrontery? Such assurance, impoliteness, lack of manners?

For some reason that I do not know the young man released Roselle. His face reddened, and I thought I could hear him begging the other's pardon. He appeared dazed, and altogether off his standing. And yet he was the larger, stronger, and more powerful; and he surely was not afraid.

It was something past understanding. I had long known of George's magnetism and his certainty of action; but had never beheld it put to a proof like this. What was it? He had merely to speak and his will was a thing accomplished.

The next instant he and Roselle were swinging among the dancers. She had not hesitated nor faltered. There was a look in her eyes that I had not seen since their meeting in the hallway; a look of ineffable happiness and resignation. The rudeness, ill-manners, and the effrontery of the act she did not notice. Her lips, red as poppies, were slightly parted; her bosom heaving, not in shame and humiliation, but from the ecstasy of the contact. There was that in her look of absolute and unconditional surrender. With her, as with everybody, he would have his way, his love there was no resisting; he was ever so with a woman.

And the young man; he came over to where I was standing; there was that about him of one who had come into an unknown contact, the dazed expression of one who has been touched by something charged with mighty forces; he was silent, wondering, and unable to understand it. But at the same time he was submissive.

Hypnotized, you say. But I am sure he was not that. Though I realized there was something about George Witherspoon wonderfully magnetic, I was positive, even then, that it was not hypnotism. What it was I knew not, but it was not that.

He had baffled even the Master. Certainly one so well versed in the mystic, as well as the material, could not be misled by anything so common and prosaic. He was something far above us, he was all out of the common; some unknown law had found here a manifestation and a personification.

I spoke to the young man beside me; who, in incoherent wonder, was watching the two dancers. The fact that I was talking seemed to draw him back to his senses.

"Did you see it?" he asked; "did you see that; what has just happened?"

"Yes," I answered. "It was very rude."

"Rude? Did you say rude? Really, I had not thought of it. And yet, come to think of it, it was rude, wasn't it? Funny! I never had such an experience in all my life. When he touched me it was just like fire passing through my body. My mind felt as though some one else was using it; as though I had suddenly presented it to another.

"What was it that he told me? Ah, yes, he called me Bub. Bub, mind you." I could see that he was regaining himself. "Bub! As if I were insignificant! Told me to go way back and sit down. Me! Jack Wallers! Mind you!

"Funny part is, I believed him. I just wonder if he could do it again. I say, hello, what is this? Look over in the doorway. The police. Now what's happened? Wonder what they want? Look at that. Wowie!"

CHAPTER XII

BATTLE IN THE BALLROOM

IT ALL came just that suddenly. Even while the youth was speaking I saw the door open, and through the doorway the blue uniforms of a dozen policemen. Simpson was at their head, with Wilkins. Behind them the Master.

They filed in quickly, and stood grouped about the entrance; the old man said something to Wilkins and then took a seat over by the orchestra. It was all done suddenly; the setting took but an instant. The Master sitting aloof and apart where he could be a studious spec-

tator of what was about to happen. In his long, black robe, his white, silvery beard, there against the palm leaves, he had all the imposing presence of a Druid at an incantation.

The dance was still in progress. Neither Wilkins nor Simpson knew what man they were after. Though it was not difficult, by any means, to make the selection. By far the most graceful couple, the most attractive and distinguished, was Roselle and her partner.

I could see Simpson peering studiously about the ballroom. The couple was coming toward them; Wilkins looked over toward the palm bower; the Master nodded. The detective turned to Simpson. And then it started.

I shall never remember just what happened; it was one of those kaleidoscopic moments that are a blur of action. The chief stepped out to the dancers and held up an official, detaining hand. That was all. The next instant the room was full of shrieking women; the orchestra had ceased, pandemonium was swirling, and George Witherspoon was the vortex.

I don't know just how he did it; his actions were too dazzling for the eye to follow; the only impression left upon my memory was a blur of movement, and then a sudden stop, with his calm figure contemplating with acute interest the inert body that he had knocked skidding across the slippery floor of the ballroom. I saw no blow, but I heard its impact, even above the music. I remember the body of the police chief cutting a lane through the dancers, upsetting men and women, and the fugitive thought that for no reason at all, tattoed itself upon my brain. "Twenty thousand!"

In the next instant all the officers were upon him; cries, shrieks, and pandemonium. The guests instinctively ranged in an arc to watch the conflict. Above them, on the platform of the orchestra, was the Master, imperturbable, noting every detail. His presence vivified in me the last injunction, "Keep out of conflict."

But I could watch. Never have I seen such a struggle, never such a man, such a master over mortals. In that blurred recollection I can see George Witherspoon battling with the throngs of his opponents; they were larger, stronger, more powerful and outnumbering; but he was their master.

They could not reach him, his movements were so swift, so certain, and so bewildering that he was never where they sought him. At every second, like tongues of flame, his blows were leaping outward. And he never missed; at each impact a policeman went down and under.

In a moment he was stepping over the bodies of his assailants. They swirled up and down the hall, trying vainly to surround him. But they could not. He never made one false move or action; the correlation of his brain and body was perfection. He worked the attackers against each other, maneuvering them into endless collision, driving them one against the other.

The adeptness and precision of his movements was past the human; he was never where they sought him, but always at the unexpected. He wove in and out of them like a shadow, cutting them down like puppets, a veritable whirlwind of strife and action. In a moment he would have been the master.

But just then something happened. A woman screamed, a rose-colored streak shot out from the arc of spectators. It was Roselle! Not twenty feet away, bleared and unsteady, was Simpson. Clutched in his hand was an automatic.

It was one of those tense moments into which is strained a lifetime. A shot into that throng was certain murder. Staggering and bleeding, crazed with passion, Simpson was waving the gun about him. A dozen men sprang forward. At the instant the girl, driven by all the emotions of her nature, sprang upon him, her hand clutched the gun and thrust it upward. Bullets splattered against the ceiling.

But Simpson had lost all reason; the terrific blow he had received had splashed his soul with the red blood of murder; his wild eyes were those of one who has been plunged suddenly into the abyss of madness. He did not see the girl, nor recognize that she was a woman; all he saw was opposition.

He wrenched the pistol free. I can see it yet. The maiden, tender, pale, delicate, full of sacrifice; the great giant, frenzied police chief towering above her, his heavy fingers digging into her throat and his automatic descending with trip-hammer force upon his victim. But the blow never landed!

I was springing forward, the Master, Wilkins, every man that was in the room.

But we were not as quick as George Witherspoon. He had seen it all. With a rapidity that made his former marvelous movements seem slow and turgid, he avoided his own assailant; he leaped upon the police chief. Before the blow had a third descended he whipped out his fist and the body of Simpson was rolling like a broken barrel against the side wall.

For a moment he stood there, his eyes blazing, a thing of vengeance, triumphant. It seemed all over. One and all, every one in the room had halted. No one dared approach him.

He was peering at Roselle. Not a look nor a gesture did he give to his opponents. He was indeed a picture.

But in that moment, somehow, I sensed that a thing had happened!

Witherspoon did not move; just stood there. There was something in his attitude, in his defiance, of a lion that is wounded, of a monarch holding off in the last fatal moment the jackals that surround him. Whether any one else perceived it I do not know; but I was positive, at the instant, that the man was wounded—yes, dying!

His eyes grew glassy. He staggered. In all that assemblage was not the sound of a whisper. All was wonder; he commanded awe and admiration. Even in dying he was distinctive.

He reached his hand out for Roselle. Just as he touched her, just as she nestled to him, he crumpled, his knees sagged forward, and he fell face downward on the dance floor.

The crowd surged forward; in a moment, like all crowds, it had wreathed a circle. Women were sobbing, men exclaiming, cackles of hysterical laughter cutting into the sudden babble. Roselle was kneeling beside George, futilely endeavoring to call him back to the living.

A physician stepped forward. In an instant he had turned him over and had opened his shirt. While he was making his professional examination the crowd was waiting, expectant, the impending verdict driving it again to silence. Finally the doctor straightened; his face was white and settled; his words decisive.

"Dead," he said; "dead. The man is stone-dead!"

ALL this, though it takes time in relating, occurred in a few short moments. Across the film of my memory it has left a picture. I can see it all, I have seen it, many times and often. One moment the hall was alive with Christmas mirth and jollity, in another pandemonium had broken like a maelstrom; and in the next grim tragedy itself had stalked across the dance floor.

The humor of dancing had flown out of the windows; the ball was broken up. In its stead were excitement, hysterical women, and white-faced men. Policemen wounded and bleeding, stricken as if they had been at death grips with a whirlwind; and the body of the police chief slowly coming back to life, and receiving as it were, drip by drip, the trickling drops of consciousness; in the center George Witherspoon, his eyes glazed, his hair scarcely ruffled, fair and beautiful even as he had been in life. To me it seemed scarcely possible that he could lie there stricken. It had been so sudden.

The guests thronged about him; old playmates, sweethearts of other days, looking, remembering, wondering, none of them understanding. The rumors they had heard of him had been mysterious, incoherent, and enigmatic; now here they had had a manifestation. His actions had been rude, unmannerly, impossible; but they were accepted.

It had ever been so; whatever he did, he had always been able, by some means to be justified in the minds of others. His beauty, personality—something—had enforced it.

And so it was even now. I am sure there was none in that room whose heart did not go out to him. Even in death he called for admiration. A policeman standing by me stroked tenderly a great lump over his eye.

"I knew him when he was a boy, Mr. Warren, when you and he were shavers; but I never knew he could fight like that. He almost knocked my head off. What killed him?"

The last words shook me out of a dream, into sudden grim reality. George Witherspoon, my playmate, was dead; Roselle was kneeling there beside him, her beautiful face sad and deadened, her hand lovingly, tenderly stroking the hair away from his forehead. Some one touched me. I turned. It was the Master, and behind him Wilkins.

"Dead!" I exclaimed, scarcely knowing what I was saying. "George Witherspoon, my playmate."

But the Master shook his head; back of him I could see the querulous eyes of Wilkins shifting uncertainly from the old man to myself, as if it were all a puzzle.

"We don't know," said the Master. "I observed it all. This is what I was afraid of. He would cheat the devil. He is dead certainly, Walter, but be assured that this is not the end of the Rebel Soul. On this night he is a being rampant. We must be cautious."

He placed his hand upon my shoulder and spoke softly; at the same time reassuringly.

"Be careful, Walter. Don't get excited. Take things easy. The evening is only beginning, and almost anything may happen. Remember that we are not solving a common problem. Yonder is Roselle. See that she is escorted home immediately. Don't under any circumstances leave her for an instant.

"Watch everything. See everything—take in every move and detail. And whatever happens, under no stress nor condition allow yourself to become involved in any struggle. Let matters take their course. If you don't, it will be fatal; I cannot help you.

"To-night you are a witness—nothing else; we both are helpless. The best we can do is to gather evidence that will help us in the future. We must know exactly what we are fighting; what we have to do and how we are going to do it."

As usual he spoke in riddles. He had a way of knowing things that were beyond my slow ken and thinking. Yet, though he was enigmatic I had every reason to repose in him a confidence implicit. Every time that he had warned me events had come to the prediction that he had made.

I had been robbed and ruined; the disasters of the last few moments he had foreseen. And the evening was but beginning! What more could there be in store?

Nevertheless I kept up my courage. I had confidence in his wisdom and realized that he understood better than any other how to handle the situation. He would make no blunders and whatever he did, good would emanate.

Accordingly I hurried to Roselle and with the help of Clara, who, I confess, was not at all tragic with grief, persuaded her that we must be leaving right away.

IT WAS not easy, of course. She had a strange infatuation for the dead man. She had loved him, I knew; and he had fastened upon her spirit. Love is a consuming factor.

She had never loved another—of that I was certain.

Nevertheless, we convinced her. Everything had been done that could be done; what had happened had been far and away above our powers of prevention. It was better to leave the rest in the hands of others. She was badly in need of repose and quietness.

Besides, Simpson, the police chief, had recovered consciousness and had assumed direction. He was totally unaware, apparently, of his sudden lapse into madness, and with his usual officiousness was giving his orders.

The very sight of him was repulsive to the girl. It was manifest that she feared him. Therefore she consented; and without any outward show of emotion, and with splendid calmness and repression, prepared for leaving.

In a moment I had conducted them out of the babbling crowd to the car. Outside was darkness: the lights about the entrance had gone out and we could distinguish objects about us only with difficulty. On the curb was the Master, waiting.

He was without his hat, and in the blackness what with his dark coat blending into the night and his silvery white beard, he had all the spectral illusory impression of the spray of a waterfall dropping out of the darkness. It was a strange impression he made and a weird one.

I am afraid that I, calm and reserved as I always proclaimed myself, was a little wrought into the abnormal. Though it was the natural phenomena of the simplest incidents—the transition from the lighted ballroom into the thick blackness—it caught me. At the moment it was symbolic. So would the old man guide us through the shadows; his was the light of wisdom that would be salvation.

With the completion of the thought came brightness: the lights suddenly flared up, flashing on the sidewalk. The Master was smiling kindly, the same old reassurance, the mellow light in his eyes, soothing and convincing. He touched me gently on the shoulder.

"Just a word, Walter. Remember!"

"Yes, sir."

"No violence: no opposition."

"Yes, sir."

I said it not because I really understood him, but becausse I had grown accustomed to obeying. With what I knew and what I had undergone, I was ready enough to obey him. And undoubtedly he realized it, for he turned immediately to the others.

The girl was lost in her wraps, gazing straight ahead, saying nothing, engrossed in her thoughts and feelings. He spoke to her.

"Roselle. Do you know me? You know the Master?"

She looked at him absently.

"Yes, yes," she answered, as if striving vainly to drive her thoughts back into the present. "Yes, yes, the Master. What is it?"

"Good-by."

"Oh, is that all?" There was relief in the expression, relief from interruption. "Good night, Master."

"He took her by the arm.

"My child," he said, "you do not understand me. I said good-by. One of us, you or I, is about to pass into another life entirely. We may not see each other for a long time. I have come to say good-bye. And I wish also to encourage you.

"Circumstance may bring up necessity. Things may happen. If, in the future, at some time, you have occasion for my assistance, think of the Master. He will be ever ready: he will come."

As he spoke his voice grew kinder, full of solicitude and tender concern for this frail, beautiful girl who might be even then poised on an abyss of peril.

"Do not be afraid," he continued. "Stay by the one you love. Be devoted, Fear no evil. Whatever happens, do not for a single moment doubt nor waver. You are right; love will be triumphant. You can save him."

With that he saw us into the machine, gave us good cheer, said, "good night," and left us. I could see by the expression of the girl and her abstraction that his words had as yet made no impression upon her.

But I understood the Master. I was certain from my own experience that he had written, as it were, with invisible ink the words into her memory. At the proper time circumstances would bring them into color.

But what were they? What was awaiting? What?

CHAPTER XIII

ROSELLE

AS WE sped homeward on the crisp December night my mind was full of wonder. Realities, uncertainties, and conjectures! Everything seemed shuffled, woven into a world of weirdness and unreality.

The events of the evening had been sudden. I could not understand them nor the Master and his almost certain foresight. Why had he allowed this man whose every movement he appeared to know to be crushed to death there in the ballroom? What had killed him? And now that he was dead, what was there to fear? Why this warning? Why this solicitude for the safety of Roselle? Was it Witherspoon that he was fearing, some impending aftermath of his sudden ending? Or was there yet another? Surely he did not fear a dead man!

And above all, why did not the Master come out plainly and make a statement, so that I could at least know in what direction danger was approaching?

The death I had but just now witnessed had disturbed me deeply. It was like pulling the fibers out of part of my existence. George Witherspoon had been part of my being, part of the essence of my life, a segment of that consciousness and interpretation which alone constitutes the individuality of a mortal. Hitherto my life had been woven, shaped, warped, and directed by the genius that was Witherspoon.

I loved him, I hated him—and I felt, somehow I knew, that I could not do without him. He had been a great spirit, obeying some unknown law, and perhaps a slave to some unknown power. He was the Rebel Soul, and as such he was almost as much to be feared as was the devil.

What was he? Was this mystery that had corrugated my whole life with unreality to go unraveled? I refused to think so.

At home the lights were gleaming. When we were out the house was never darkened: but I knew that the servants were asleep. We alighted, quickly; it was cold and a warm fire was waiting. Before the chauffeur had driven up the graveled driveway toward the garage we were half-way across the veranda.

Inside, in the living-room, the fitful

gleam of the fire in the old-fashioned fireplace was throwing shadows intermittently. I turned the log over and added a few extra fagots; a cheerful blaze and a glow of warmth succeeded.

The girls were both dead tired and so almost on the instant they reposed themselves in the easy chairs and toasted their toes before the cheerful embers. I was hungry; the excitement had sharpened my appetite almost to the ravenous.

"Better call Bertha," said my wife when I started for the kitchen. "Don't go puttering about her pantry."

But I did not heed her. I had a benedick's love for prowling around and dipping into the good things. In no time I had some tongue, several sandwiches, some cake, and several pieces of pie for our supper; besides some salad. A good pitcher of milk completed it. Then I carried it all into the other room by the fire-glow.

Clara was hungry and ate eagerly and with a relish, so did I; but Roselle would not touch it. Instead she gazed steadfastly, intently at the glowing embers. Her form shook slightly. I realized what good a bit of food might do her, and tried persuasion. Clara joined me.

"Come, come, Roselle, don't be foolish. It's all in a lifetime. There are plenty of others."

I knew that the girl was full of spirit: but I was not prepared for the life and defiance that lighted into flashing.

"Others —" she exclaimed — "others, Clara? How you speak! You know that I loved him!"

My wife smiled negatively.

"You think you did. There are hundreds of others who have loved him, in the same manner, and to the same purpose. It may seem cruel but I am going to say it. I am glad it happened. He can harm no others."

"Oh," she cried, "shame on you! Shame on you! You are cowardly! You are worse than the others! Why do you say it! Why did they do it! All those great strong policemen fighting one poor boy! It was disgraceful. And that great lubbering brute of a police chief. Oh, I wish —" She clenched her little fist and her eyes snapped with scorn and contempt.

"But he fought them! He was their master. He was splendid. He was a hero. They were cowards, ruffians, one and all."

I realized then that I must enlighten her. She was ignorant of the preceding events of the evening. She had witnessed only the culmination, the battle in the ballroom, the wonderful exhibition that George Witherspoon had given of his prowess.

She was romantic. His dazzling coruscating personality had flooded her mind with its luster. It was right that I should tell her, by a plain statement of the facts persuade her that it was best to acquiesce in the acceptance of the things that must be.

"ROSELLE," I said, "you do not understand. Those policemen had a perfect right to be there; they came only in the sworn pursuit of their duty. George Witherspoon is an outcast.

"You remember the peculiar little card that I received some time back bearing the inscription 'The King of Thieves'? It struck you as odd at the time: you interpreted it as an ad for a coming scenario. Which in truth it was, only this time it was a film of life and blood and action.

"That little card was a prophecy of peril. The King of Thieves was George Witherspoon.

"With an effrontery which was always his characteristic he had warned me. He was going to rob me, to loot our bank, and he defied me to stop him. He scorned every obligation, every love and tie that should bind him.

"His every action was a bitter repudiation of the love that has been ours in our childhood. Since the change came on him he has hated me with every fiber, every ounce, every vibration of his life and being. He was sworn to my destruction.

"Naturally I took precautions. Without allowing either you or Clara to be aware of the disaster that was impending, I quietly, with the help of the Master and the police, arranged a system of defense, which I thought impregnable. With any other man on the whole wide earth it would have been so. With George Witherspoon it was only an inducement.

"I was warned in the afternoon that to-night would bring the finish. The Master warned me. Everything happened just to the prediction. In some manner, I know not how, he went through every guard and watcher. He looted the bank of thousands; the institution which stood for the name of Warren has been

practically wrecked and ruined now.

"That accounts for the policemen and the battle in the ballroom. They were under orders; they were to take him, no matter what the cost. Had they found him in the open there would undoubtedly have been shooting: in the crowded ballroom that was impossible, and the affair devolved into a contest of brawn and muscle."

I had hoped to persuade her; but I was disappointed. She was simple and had no appreciation of the complexities of our legal ethics. She was romantic and in love, and George Witherspoon was her hero. In her woman's nature, in her defiance, that alone was the thing that counted.

You can't argue with a woman: I have tried it. When she loves, everything is settled; all things else are mere externals. She is ever perverse in the intensity of her devotion.

Roselle's beautiful black eyes were ablaze with her anger: she had no sense or reason, only an unquenchable, undying ardor in defense of her consecration.

"Oh," she cried, "you, too, Walter! You, too; you who loved him! I had thought that love is holy and undying. And you forsake him! For the love of a few miserly dollars you throw down all the remembrances of your childhood, foreswear all the goodness and nobleness of your nature!

"How I hate your money! It is good for only the warping of souls and for corruption. George Witherspoon was greater than you all. The Master says so. I have his words. He says that I am right, and I know it. Love, love, always and forever!"

Just then a slight sound; rumbling, indistinct, and foreboding. With the events of the evening I could expect most anything. A step sounded on the veranda: undoubtedly a messenger: some further news of sudden import.

"Some one coming," spoke my wife. "You had better see— Why, they are coming in without the formality of ringing. Better see—"

A breath of cold air coming up the hallway proclaimed the front door open. I stepped across the room. As I did so the living-room door was opened. I stood face to face with—

George Witherspoon!

It was like a blast from the supernatural. I threw up my arm before my face, and drew back like one who has suddenly come in contact with the lightning. I remember Clara screaming, and her face growing white as marble. Roselle never blanched nor faltered; she was triumphant, she swayed slightly; but it was only with the intensity of her joy and spirit.

For an instant he stood there; so natural, so beautiful, so certain that he could not be else than the living. A smile was on his lips, and as he looked over at Clara and me an infinity of scorn and untold derision was in his expression. The contempt of that look would have filled a volume. But to the girl his attitude was all sunshine. He turned to her and held out his arms.

"Come," he said, "Roselle."

She did not hesitate nor falter. With a low cry she sprang forward and was gathered up as if she had been a baby. With a quick movement he stepped over, plucked her coat and hat from the chair.

That was all. Not a word or sound did he utter. In another moment he was bearing her in his arms through the door and across the veranda.

Dazed and uncertain, shaken to the roots of my being, I followed. At the curb a great, powerful machine was waiting. I saw him place her in the car and gather the robes about her. I heard him speak to the chauffeur; words which I shall ever remember, clear, distinct, vibrant, ringing with the musical dramatic intonation which was ever characteristic of the George Witherspoon who was the Rebel Soul.

"On, on!" he was saying. "On, on, Alonzo! With the speed of the night winds, on! Into the Land of Nowhere!"

The great car shot forward, swerved and curved and turned into the highway. For a few short moments I watched the uncertain, baleful tail-light filtering into the distance—then nothing; nothing but the silence and the extreme desolation of my existence.

Such was the passing of Roselle.

CHAPTER XIV

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH HIM?"

FOR a long time I stood there, bareheaded in the cold December midnight, confounded, overwhelmed, unable to overcome the withering somberness that shrouded upon me. My mind was a

waste of unstirred and calamitous desolation.

I could not think or utter. I could only peer vainly into the darkened distance whence had gone our loved one. I realized that it was useless: that she was engulfed and swallowed up in the personality that was Witherspoon. She was gone forever.

Somehow I never knew until that moment just how great a part in our lives had been Roselle's. She had been the light that had gladdened our household; the flicker of golden sunshine that warmed us; the link that bound us, with laughter and with song, to youth and beauty. Even as George Witherspoon, she had abandoned us for the land of the mysterious shadow.

What was it? Why was it? This thing that brooked like a black, unending incubus over my destiny? All my loved ones: every one that I loved or cherished must be crushed in the maw of the unrelenting.

What was it? This mysterious unknown that stood out all-powerful, isolated, and alone in this world of prosaic reality. It had caught Witherspoon, changed him, elevated him to a height above all mortals, and given him the morals of the devil. It was inexorable; it was sublime: it was hellish.

It was something that I could not conceive of, before which, at the mere attempt at visualization, my mind seemed to shrink and shrivel. It was beyond me.

And now it had claimed Roselle. Would it do unto her as it had done unto the other? Would it warp the lightness of her spirit into the pure vindictive? Would she, too, become as the other—superhuman, splendid, wicked?

I could not think so. Something in my inner being told me: her softness, her gentleness, her beauty, her purity would be triumphant.

The thought gave me sudden calmness. A wave from the opposite pole of emotion suffused itself upon me. I loved them both, they were part of my existence, they would tame each other, the goodness of Roselle would bring back to me the playmate of my childhood.

I do not know why it was, whether it was Fate, or one of those unaccountable twistings that Destiny takes when she is playing; but at that moment I received a message; or at least I so construed it. Certainly it was unusual that such a thing should happen at an hour that was so late and so unseemly.

Over in a back street, in one of the smaller buildings, a light flickered suddenly through the blackness. Abstractedly I watched it; more for the reason that it was solitary, I suppose, than for any other.

A moment later came the notes of an old-fashioned graphophone. Rasping, to be sure, and cheap, but playing a tune that has lighted up the ages. I was not deeply religious, but at that moment I understood the wonderful potency of that message, that has blazed a dazzling pathway through the ages and has brought man to his greatest endeavor, and has given him always determination and courage in his weakness. It was playing: "Jesus, the Light of the World."

It was like a blaze of sunshine in the darkness, a balm of ineffable contentment and consolation; a truth mellowed through the blackness on the wings of music; truth unending and forever. I gripped its meaning, saw its purport, and the interpretation.

Jesus was love undying, virtue, purity, and sacrifice. And Roselle was His angel. She was to venture into the land of shadow and by the light of her sacrifice, devotion, and purity free George Witherspoon from the grip of this thing that held him. Her spirit would pervade him. Between the two contrary lights hers would be the one that would lead him. I remember the words of the Master and the potency of their meaning:

"Be devoted; never waver; love will be triumphant."

Just then I realized that I had a companion; I felt and could hear her animated breathing. I turned. Clara was there beside me.

"You here?" I asked. "I thought that I was alone; how long have you been here?"

"Since the beginning, Walter. I watched them go. And—and I heard that song. It has set me to thinking. Surely such a coincidence must have some meaning. It does seem like a voice that is straight from Heaven. The Lord has use for our Roselle, and has chosen this simple means of telling us of His purpose.

"You loved George Witherspoon, and I remember the time when he was all that a young man should be. Forgive me, Walter, for my hatred that was so unseemly. I am sure of Roselle, I love and have confidence in her: she would not have run away with a monster.

The Russian gave a scream of terror. The sword he had drawn in his rage seemed to have become white hot, to have seared the hand that held it . . .

"When a woman loves she has an unfathomed intuition. Roselle is right; and you.

"I alone was wrong. There is something holding George Witherspoon. You must save him. And at the same time you must bring us back Roselle."

I DON'T believe that anything at the moment could have given me greater pleasure.

Hitherto I had been quite alone in my devotion to my old schoolmate. I had stood for him inexorably, believing always in his goodness. Holding out against all the fear and dread of my wife, for his vindication.

I had never hoped nor dreamed that she could be won over. Only a miracle could have accomplished it. And that is what had happened. At an impossible moment, and old squawky graphophone singing an immortal song had done what all my persuasion and insistence could not even attempt to accomplish in our behalf.

But there was work to be done, for all that.

I now called up police headquarters, and asked for Simpson. I hardly expected to locate him at such a time of the night, but there was nothing like trying. Luckily he was there.

"This is Mr. Warren," I told him. "I

did not hope to get you, but I thought I would call up anyway."

He laughed.

"Yes, it is late, Mr. Warren. But I am not sleepy. A bit too excited, in fact, to think of slumber. When a man has just made twenty thousand and has engineered the biggest haul of his lifetime, he is likely to feel too frisky to think of such common things as sheets and pillows."

"Yes, I suppose so," I answered. "May I ask you, Mr. Simpson, what you have done with George Witherspoon?"

"Done?" came the answer. "Done? Why, we left him lying in state, of course. Time enough for the rest in the morning. You don't suppose that I am going to pack him around in my pocket, do you?"

"Did you leave any guard or watcher?"

"Over a dead man? Hardly. Why? You don't think he will walk away, do you?"

"I don't know," I replied. "It seems so. He was here not a half hour ago, alive and healthy."

"What!"

I repeated what I had just told him.

"Say," came the answer, "are you talking in your sleep? Pinch yourself, Mr. Warren."

I laughed.

"I was never so much awake in my life. George Witherspoon is alive and healthy. He was here not a half an hour ago. He left in an automobile bound southward. He has abducted Roselle Rohilla.

"Better get busy with the telephone and telegraph: and you better send a car after him. Or, if you doubt my words, send up a man to make a verification. You will have to move in a hurry."

"You're crazy!"

He hung up with insistence and finality. I could not again get the connection.

"What did he say?" asked my wife.

I told her. In my heart I pitied the poor fellow's disillusion. So did she.

"I wonder if I could get the Master," I said. "He is the one to speak to. This would interest him. He would know just what to do. I don't think—"

"No, hardly," answered Clara. "At the present time he is undoubtedly on the train bound for the city. I think we may regard the day as ended. If only it had not been Roselle."

Like a woman she must have her spell of sobbing. Up to now she had restrained herself to a wonderful degree; I think it was in great measure to lighten the grief that was my own which is ever a way that a true wife has. I, too, could have wept, but, being a man, the tears could not come that freely. Just the same I suffered: my whole body was racked with grief and emotion.

It was best that we retire and leave the rest for morning. Which indeed was exactly the thing we were about to do. But just then the telephone rang. I picked it up. It was Simpson calling.

"This Mr. Warren?" His voice was hard and deadened. Harsh with anger.

"Yes."

"I want to know, Mr. Warren, what kind of foolishness this is. What have you done with that body?"

"Then there was no body?" I answered. "You despatched a man to find out? Of course there wasn't. Have you sent those telegrams? I would not lose a moment, Mr. Simpson. The law is far-reaching. The police are powerful. You know your man. In twenty minutes you can have all the police of the State warned and watching out for him."

I thought he swore. "Telegrams my hat!" he exclaimed. "Police fiddlesticks! Rouse all the State to look for a dead man! I'd look pretty! Look here, Mr. Warren, cut out all this foolishness and get down to business. I want that body; and I want that twenty thousand. It was my brains that earned it!"

"Mr. Simpson," I said, "you must be laboring under a delusion. The man was here only a short time ago. He was not dead at all—he couldn't have been."

From the sounds that came over the phone the man was almost choking.

"Delusions!" he shouted. "I'll show you who has the delusion. I'll teach you to put your fingers into the legal machinery again. You'll be glad enough to restore that body before I am through with you. Next time you will remember."

With that he hung up.

CHAPTER XV

THE MASTER SPEAKS

WAS there ever anything more exasperating, so threatening, so insolent? I could not help thinking that this was what came of making a blacksmith a police chief. Was there ever such in-

capacity? The man had moved just so far and would move no farther. The thought of that twenty thousand had both paralyzed and intoxicated his mind.

Well, I was sorry, but there was no reason for my being unduly worried. I had done all that I could do. In reporting to police headquarters I had done my duty: even though it was effort wasted.

Now we would retire. In the morning I would hurry to the bank and ascertain the extent of my losses. I would have done so now were it not for the injunction of the Master. Besides, the place was guarded. And after what had happened it was fitting that I remain with Clara. We had best get to bed.

But again we were interrupted. This time the door bell. The night had been so packed with calamity and events that I did not see how anything else could happen. I switched on the lights and went to the door. It was the Master.

I was overjoyed to see him. I led him into the living-room and excitedly, eagerly, detailed just what had happened. Then I added the conversation that I had just had with headquarters. He smiled at this.

"Simpson," he said, "is not much of a police chief. But he is not to be blamed. It is not his fault that he is holding a position that calls for excessive training. It is our splendid politics." He mused a minute. "Poor Simpson!" he added. "Twenty thousand! He's a poor man; that is a fortune."

"But," I exclaimed, "the rest—George Witherspoon, Roselle? How do you account for it?"

"Walter," he said, " I don't account of it; I have quit accounting. I can only conjecture. In a case like this where everything is impossible it is well not to be too certain. A great deal of it has been foreseen and I am foreseeing farther.

"But as yet it is a whole lot guesswork. I have hopes, however, of shading my hypothesis into theory and that again into proof and explanation."

"Then," I exclaimed, "you foresaw it. You knew all the while that Roselle was in danger. Why, why did you not stop it?"

He held up his hand. "Don't become excited. I knew that George Witherspoon was coming; that he would as surely take Roselle; I cautioned you that she was in danger.

"But it was not of George Witherspoon I warned you; her peril lay in herself, in the impetuous eagerness with which she would defend him and the unknown thing that might have happened in the moment of excitement.

"In fact, I am here to encourage you, Walter, both you and Clara. What has occurred this night is of the greatest moment and most conducive to good. You need not fear for your loved one. George Witherspoon would not harm her for all the power and all the wealth that has accumulated through the ages.

"He loves her. And she is his master. This is the first time that love has really entered into his being. If, as we can suppose, he is controlled by something evil, we have given that thing an antagonist that it cannot master.

"The Rebel Soul a cynic and the Rebel Soul in love are two altogether different beings. The fact that he can love at all is of the greatest purport. It tells us that lurking somewhere is the real George Witherspoon; that this being is unnatural, that he is not as he should be.

"In giving him Roselle we have found a lever; love, virtue, purity will be triumphant. She will hold him, prepare the way for our coming, and when we arrive assist in the great and final struggle."

No doubt it was all very plain to the Master; he had worked it out and could form, as he said, some sort of a conjecture as to what was coming. But to me it was a limitless sea of enigma; I could only flounder about, and get nowhere.

"I don't understand it!" I exclaimed. "It was unnatural; it was puerile and foolish."

"What?"

"This playing at death. The scene there in the ballroom. Why did he sham at dying when he knew that he was their master?"

The Master smiled.

"That," he said, "is the one place where he especially displayed his wisdom. Outside were armed men, waiting. They had orders to shoot. If there is one thing positive about the Rebel Soul it is his materiality. He cannot stop a bullet.

"Outside was certain death and he knew it. His only reason for coming to the ball was to see Roselle and the dramatic touch it would give him. He is spectacular. When he saw himself surrounded he conveniently played at death and disarmed suspicion. Afterward he walked away at his leisure. It was as I expected."

"Then," I exclaimed, "if you knew it why did you call in the police at all?"

"Because I was foolish. I am only mortal and so sometimes make mistakes. I hoped to take him, or at least learn more about him. Wilkins had grown weary and superstitious, he wished to use the police. I consented.

"Wilkins swore that the Rebel Soul was the devil. He was just a bit afraid of him, and had for him not a little admiration. You will recall that in the struggle he stayed aloof and spent his time in waiting."

"Was he frightened?"

"Not in the physical sense. No. The moment that he saw Witherspoon he realized that they could not overpower him."

"Where is he? What is Wilkins doing now?"

"At the present time he is breaking all the speed laws southward."

Thank the Lord, there was some one awake and doing!

"When you telephoned to Simpson," continued the Master, "he was at headquarters awaiting developments. You know what he thinks of your police force. As he said: 'There must be some one alive to get some action.' He was waiting. When your message came he did not delay or parley. The police of the State are watching. In two moments he had started; plunging southward."

"Good for Wilkins!"

"Do you think he will catch him?"

"No. All we are hoping for is his direction. I wish to know where he is going. Once we learn his destination we can begin the real adventure!"

FOR a while we sat in silence. My mind was seething. Riddles! Riddles! Riddles! Everything seemed to be going on and we were getting nowhere. He had gone through us like a shadow. He had done just as he pleased. And we could not stop him.

Was there really, after all, such a person as my old George Witherspoon, or was I dreaming? Was this strange being human? What was he, a flame, a vengeance, a back rush from eternity? What? In spite of the old gentleman's assertion as to his materiality I could not, somehow, assign him any category but the supernatural.

At last the Master spoke.

"Well," he said, "this is the very last time."

"What?"

"That we shall employ the police. Henceforth we shall use our own organization. This is not a case for mere detectives.

"Witherspoon is not the man we are after. Our problem is to discover the real George Witherspoon, to distinguish the blending, to separate the effects and seek for causes.

"Something powerful, fearless, almost omnipotent, is lurking somewhere. We must find it. Should we continue our present tactics, we would finish nowhere. It would be a crime to punish George Witherspoon without discovering his secret. And it might be folly. Undoubtedly one of the greatest truths of creation is reposing in him. We must never cease to our efforts until we learn it."

"And Roselle?"

"Ah," said the Master. "Let us give thanks for Roselle. The girl is beautiful and is good. The purity of her spirit is the kind that radiates the sunshine. Sin cannot touch her.

"She loves him. Not all the strength of the world will turn her. She is that proper woman, who when she loves a man will lead him through all shadows.

"Henceforth the spirit of George Witherspoon will localize about her beauty. He will love her, he will be jealous of her, he will protect her; woe to the one that endeavors to step between them! From now on he is divided; his cynicism must cuddle alongside of a love undying. In his division will come our strength."

I could not but hope so. Really we had need enough for courage. I had a world of faith in the Master, in his wisdom, and the far-reaching resources of the secret organization of which he was the head and leader. I knew that its numbers were almost legion; that education, science, all the accumulated lore of the ages were at its disposal; that it ramified into every grade and stratum of society; that it reached to the poles of the earth and backward; that the keenest wit of the brightest men and women was contributed gladly toward the great attainment. I realized that everything, no matter how small, drove unceasingly toward the common center; that the Master was the head and hub of all this wisdom and that we were far from weaklings.

Just the same I had a healthy, wholesome dread of the thing we were oppos-

ing. It seemed that something knowing the great powers of our organization had raised up this one to oppose it. That Providence was playing humor; that this one so unearthly, whose province was destruction, was the embodiment of that very spiritual essence and life evanescing that we were bent on solving. There was something grim about it, and terrible, that called for shudders. There was need enough for courage.

My thoughts and misgivings were interrupted by the door-bell; some one rang it. Would this night never end? Once again I switched on the lights and sought the cause of the interruption.

Outside, on the porch, were two policemen. What could be the matter? Opening the door, I bade them enter; it was cold outside; and as I never for an instant considered that they came for other than making a report or the seeking of information, I chose naturally to impart it in warmth and comfort.

Both of the men were visibly embarrassed; but this I took as the effect of their position, and to my exclusiveness as a banker. I had been acquainted with them all my life; with one of them I had attended grammar school when a youngster.

Inside the living-room they looked at each other in some discomfort; spoke to my wife in a confused and affable way, and nodded to the Master. I waited for them to disclose their errand; and they each one waited on the other. Not quite understanding I asked them.

For a moment there was even more confusion. Finally one of them, weaving his hat around with his fingers in embarrassment, blurted out the truth.

"I—I am sorry, Mr. Warren. It doesn't sound reasonable, I know; but orders is orders, you know, and we are merely patrolmen. We have come to place you under arrest."

CHAPTER XVI

ARRESTED

"WHAT!"—too dumbfounded for more utterance.

He repeated his mission.

"What is the meaning of this insolence? What may the charge be?"

The other officer answered; after the ice was broken he was the better conversationalist of the two.

"It is Simpson," he said briefly. "It is preposterous, I know. Nothing but downright insolence to arrest a man of your integrity and position. But you can't tell Simpson; he is the most bull-headed man I ever worked for.

"He says he don't care who you are; you have thwarted him in getting this twenty thousand. You have been tampering and interfering with the execution of the law.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Warren. This is a very unpleasant task for me, who have known you all my life, I must assure you; but orders are orders, sir. I have hated my job, sir, ever since they turned the force over to that blacksmith. Were it not for my wife and babies I would resign to-morrow."

So this was it! The twenty thousand! The reason and soul of the man had been cracked by the thought of money. I could not but wonder what such a man would do in the face of open bribery.

"Well," I said composedly, "so be it. I suppose you will allow me to remain here on my own recognizance. It will hardly be necessary for a man of my standing to go to jail; especially on a charge so foolish."

The man winced and blinked as if the pill were bitter.

"Those are our orders, sir," he said, "our orders."

"To jail?"

"To jail."

I understood what that meant. The chuckle-headed chief was making a travesty of police power, and employing the authority delegated to him for the promotion of justice as a weapon of his private malice.

It was impossible at this time of night for me to employ any legal means that would give me freedom. I must spend the night in jail, subject to his mercy.

My wife flew up to me, white with terror and with a righteous feminine rage at the insolence of the chief of police.

"Don't go, Walter," she said, "don't go. It is not necessary for you to spend the night in jail because the man is insane."

There was a good deal in what she said. With a woman's way she had touched the nail squarely on the head, and tapped it. Because the man had toppled from his mental balance was no reason why I should be incarcerated.

Still I was the last man that would have disobeyed the law; and I could not, would not, resist an officer. It was against

my code entirely. I was a good citizen. I believed in obeying the machinery of society implicitly, even when, as in a case like this, its wheels were slipping.

It is not permissible for a man to judge himself of that which he is accused. If I was innocent it was my misfortune to be arrested, but I could not help it. In spite of my wife I decided on acquiescence. The Master was also of my opinion.

"Better accompany them, Walter," he advised. "I shall go down and talk to Simpson. In the morning, which is not very far off, you will be released; it is only a few hours of discomfort."

So it was that I was led to prison, into the presence of Simpson, grim and insolent. He was clenching his fists in his rage. He turned upon me.

"Now, Mr. Warren, perhaps you will talk. I want to know the whereabouts of that body, and I want to know it quickly."

"Simpson," I said, disdaining the use of "Mr.", "I do not understand you. You are laboring under a misapprehension. There is no body. I informed you that the man is alive and walking. If you knew him as well as I do you might believe it."

"No doubt. And if I had as many twenty thousands as you possess I might still have use for another. What have you done with him?"

Plainly the man was out of reason. I could see the two patrolmen eying him with contempt; and their sympathetic concern for my comfort. Nevertheless, I constrained myself and went into a detailed explanation. It really would have been lowering to have lost my temper with him.

Through it all he sat threatening; his little covetous, black-dot eyes full of hatred. He was one of those men, who, once their mind is settled, live and die of the opinion.

For some reason he was set in the opinion that I was as greedy as he for the reward that was hanging over a man's dead body. His reply showed me the utter folly of explanation or of reason.

"Pooh! Pooh!" he scoffed. "Likely story, likely story! Likely one indeed! Dead men walking in their sleep! Dead men driving automobiles! Dead men stealing girls! I suppose that you will be telling me yet that I am dead man."

I said nothing, though I made the mental observation that for all the use he was as a police chief he might as well have been a dead one.

"Well," he snapped, "you can sleep in jail and see how you like it. Perhaps before morning you may find a tongue that can twist itself back into truth."

With that I was led to a cell.

By a strange coincidence it was to the old cell that I had occupied years before. And by a stranger one still it was by the same old turnkey that I was led along the corridor. Then, as now, it was George Witherspoon who had brought me.

THOUGH my position was not this time perilous I could not refrain from wondering whether all my life, at regular intervals, I was destined to be jailed for the sake of his erring genius. It did appear that while I received all the effects of his evil, he had all the glory.

There was nothing to do but make the best of it and await the morning. I sat upon the cot and, not without a shudder, endeavored to shut myself up with the intensity of my thinking. With the coming of daybreak the Master would be able to reach some one whose mind held the salt of reason. It was merely a discomfort.

But the anxiety of my suspense was not to be so enduring. The jailer stalked down the corridor, and my cell was opened; I was led out. A night man was sitting at the desk. Simpson was gone. I asked the reason for my release. The answer confirmed suspicions.

"The old man," he said, "in the black robe. The gentleman with the silver whiskers. He persuaded him. I don't know what he told him, or how he did it; but when he was through he had Simpson fairly eating out of his hand. The chief has gone home."

I am grateful. The Master had performed what, after my useless expostulation, I had considered impossible. He had induced the other to cold, calm reason. Had he persuaded him that George Witherspoon was still in the land of the living? How had he done it?

Just then the Master himself stepped in, and together through the bitter cold early morning we walked homeward. I asked him.

"No," he answered. "I left Simpson to a great extent in his own opinion. Which is as it should be. My only concern with

him was to secure your freedom, and to calm as far as possible the wrath with which he regarded you.

"For a time he was very bitter. For some reason he had taken it into his head that you wished to thwart him. When a man like that gets to thinking it is hard indeed to turn him. But I succeeded. I make him see the light and realize what a colossal blunder he was making."

"Then," I asked, "he knew the truth, or at least something of it?"

"Not at all. He knows nothing; and even if he did he would not accept it. Which is best. We are through with Simpson and likewise with the police. Their operations would but impede us. Their province is crime and trouble and not the conflict of souls and their flashings into the realm of cosmos.

"I had desired another manifestation that he was above mere mortals, to have conclusive proof that mere man cannot hold him. I have had it. I had feared that if I used the police at all, and he escaped them, they would, from that time hence, ferret him to the ends of the earth till they found him.

"It was that contingency that boded trouble; the one thing that I dreaded. I did not wish to have them prowling around in a work they could only hinder. But it appears that fortune favors."

"In what manner?"

"Why, Walter, in everything that has occurred this morning. When Simpson had the effrontery to arrest you, you were indignant at disaster. But it was merely a lucky Providence interposing. Your hour in jail says that henceforth the police will make no interference.

"Through the stubbornness of Simpson, George Witherspoon is written with the dead men. They may not have his body, but they have a hundred witnesses. Once a man is dead even the police can forget him. We have had our manisfestation, and without the sequence that I dreaded."

"Yes," I spoke, "we have had a manifestation indeed; too much of a one, I am fearing. I have been robbed of fortune and Roselle. Here's hoping that we never have such another."

"My dear boy, you do not understand. But perhaps I am growing old; if you could only see as I do."

"Yes, if."

"Your fortune, Walter, is only money. It is common and has no secret. It is not like the other. Nevertheless, I would not worry. You remember the night George Witherspoon came to see you? That night he was for an instant his own real self? That night he was prophetic. That night he warned you. And that night he gave you a pledge of friendship!"

"The emerald?"

"Exactly. How much do you estimate that you can have lost? Compute it. I think you will reach a balance."

I added up rapidly in my mind the possible extent of my losses. It did seem reassuring; there was some chance that they might reach a balance.

"Then," I exclaimed, "George Witherspoon has saved me!"

"Yes," spoke the Master, "the one has saved you from the other. Can you not see it, Walter? He loves you. He is calling to you from the darkness. Out of the mystery he came to save you.

"He is alone, in trouble; fighting against what we know not, helpless. To you alone he has appealed and to myself. Would you forsake him?"

"But this other," I interrupted, "this one, this Rebel Soul that knows but hatred? Who—what is he? Is he just another, or is he still George Witherspoon?"

"Ah," sighed the Master, "that we know not! If we but did! Then there would be no danger. Nevertheless, Walter, I think I have a solution. I shall not tell you what at present, except that he is not negation. Neither is he evil. Rather is he positive, out of the ultimate, to lead us onward."

I could not understand him; even though an educated man, my mind was that of an infant alongside the Master's. He had a way of thinking with a sweep and distance, of penetrating the ink of darkness; his mind was a mental highway that led through the unknown shadows. He talked above me, and I failed to grasp him. My thoughts were leaping along in their own straight channel.

"And Roselle?" I asked, suddenly remembering that they both had wooed her. "Which one loves her?"

"Both!"

"You say she is in no danger."

"In none whatever. Only good can come of her abduction. Good to even the Rebel Soul."

CHAPTER XVII

THE START OF THE CHASE

WELL, sir, the Master was right. As soon as possible I hurried to the bank to straighten out the confusion that I expected. On my way down I had a slight trepidation at the thought of the emerald. Had it, too, been stolen? The night before I had taken it for granted that it was immune.

But why? Why with this one that knew no honor? The thought gave me a sudden clutching. If it were gone!

Arrived at the bank, my first thoughts were to seek it. The hurried clerks, the ejaculations, and the condolence of the others I did not notice. I sought it with nervous fingers. And I was joyfully disappointed. My fears were groundless.

It reposed in all its luster, serene, green, peaceful, soothing, embodying in its beauty the good that is earth and heaven; emblematic; symbolic. What did it stand for? I felt that it was the good of Witherspoon and a love eternal.

Not until then could I attend to detail. But from then on I worked with a lightness of spirit. The disaster was computed; totals added up and the sum discovered. It reached up into sixty thousands.

Negotiable paper, currency; everything added, attained that figure. I had gone to the pains of placing everything, but what was indispensable, in another bank. Everything of value had been stolen. Except the emerald.

That was all the evidence that we retained of that night's lawless visit. It was as Wilkins had warned me; nothing had been broken; not a thing disturbed. He had come as silently as a ghost and disappeared as a shadow. There were no finger-prints, nor foot-marks, nor incriminating tokens; only the bewildered amazement of the officers; his wonder way of working and the missing valuables. To all appearances everything was usual. Even the cool, clear morning, with its blue sky and its serenity, belied the unusual.

I questioned the officers as to just what happened. They one and all shook their heads in a baffled bewilderment. It was beyond them. They had all fallen asleep simultaneously, and had only awakened at the calling of the Master. It was much like a tale of the Arabians. All out of reason; more the product of a drunken imagination than the grim truth.

But I was a business man, and business called me now, before metaphysical speculation. Therefore, I proceeded with despatch and purpose. I called up Devins, the jeweler, in regard to the emerald. The price still held.

I did not desire to dispose of it, but I planned by its means to secure the wherewithal to cover up my losses. If the stone had such a value it would be easy to continue along as usual.

Which, indeed, is just what happened. In no time I had all the cash required, and without fuss or flurry, by the poise with which I outrode disaster, increased in the hearts of my townsmen their respect for the name of Warren.

But after this things rested. I had naturally expected, owing to sequence of the events just related that these tumultuous convulsions would still continue. I was accustomed, inured, hardened and bravened into seeking for the finish.

Now that Roselle was gone I desired nothing so much as to plunge immediately into the mystery and discover its solution. Though I had been lukewarm before, perhaps frightened, the added incentive of the girl made me almost reckless. I longed for action. And I did not get it.

Affairs languished. Matters stood just where they were, with no one a bit the wiser. There was, of course, the usual aftermath of the talk and comment; flashing head-lines in the paper, Simpson's effusions and what not. It was accepted absolutely that the man had been captured and that his body had been whisked away.

And there lay the mystery, for which there were many suggestions, but of course no solution. In the all, it made a splendid story. It possessed everything of the dramatic and spectacular to create sensation. The papers told the story, depicted the splendid setting, fired up their readers with excitement—and then forgot it. As a news value it was past; nobody was interested in a dead man.

It was best that it was so. I was like the Master, shunning publicity. I was certain that it was not a case for mere machinery of police organization; that there was something subtle, unseen, far-reaching, extending on before us; that this mystery, lurking in the shrouded

depths of the unknown, could only be lighted up with light of an unguessed wisdom. And I trusted that the Master had it. Indeed, I knew it.

But, as I have said, nothing happened. The Master himself, a few days later, disappeared from the ken of society. The only knowledge and assurance I had of his place and security was a note I discovered one morning lying upon my desk. It read:

My dear Walter:

Inasmuch as my sudden disappearance might alarm you, I am taking the pains of allaying your fears beforehand. When you read this I shall be on my way after Witherspoon. I hope to penetrate the envelope that shrouds him. I shall pierce the mystery. When I am ready for action, for the strokes that lead to dénouement, I shall call you. When the time comes I desire to have you with me.

How long will I be gone? I do not know. Perhaps a month, perhaps a year, two, three, maybe five; there is no telling. I shall not cease until I have what I am after. Please do not worry over my safety—I am hale and hearty and eighty, and amply able to take care of myself.

In the mean time God bless you. Keep a cool head, take care of Clara and the babies. If you become discouraged remember that the time is surely coming when you, and Clara, Roselle, George Witherspoon, and all will be one happy family.

Once again, God bless you.

The Master.

P.S.—When Wilkins returns tell him to go to the House of Sevens and await orders.

M.

That was all. When the detective returned a few days later, chagrined at his blind pursuit, I had him read it.

"Hm!" he said. "So the old boy himself has started. Well, that suits me. Somebody's going to step mighty high and lively. He's surely old, but he's mighty high on wisdom, and he's the slyest man who ever said nothing.

"It is sure going to be some contest. It will be a toss-up. Those two birds are the most uncanny men a-living; the one is for the other. If George Witherspoon eludes the old gentleman, now that he is once started, he's a dandy; and if the Master nabs the Rebel Soul, it's a case of ditto."

I laughed. "You apparently possess an impartial admiration."

"You betcha. One is as great as the other. They and this case have got me up a tree and howling for mercy. I'm a detective, but I'm no shadow. When it comes to dead men running off with girls, driving automobiles sixty miles an hour, breaking bank vaults, cutting through society like a streak of fire-flame—why, then, I'm not in it.

"I'm Wilkins, just Wilkins, plain detective. For my part I am glad, delighted, that the Master himself has started. I was getting weary."

"Then," I asked, "you are going to step out of it?"

The man's eyes flashed; there was that in them of great excitement, anticipation, and yet withal of indignation.

"Not by a long shot! Quit the most wonderful case of my whole career? I should say not! I said I was growing weary. I am. But it is only because I know my limitation. I am man enough to realize that this case is beyond me.

"It is for the Master. He has the head. This mystery weaves too much into the dim lights and the shadows for the jurisdiction of any mere detective. He alone can unravel it.

"No, I am not out of it. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not pull me away from George Witherspoon and his secret. But I am glad—wonderfully glad—that the old man has gone into active service. Something will surely come of it. I shall do what I can and I hope some day to be in at the finish."

BUT in spite of this assurance the months that followed belied his confident assertion. Nothing came of it whatever. The Master sent no word nor token; and in the weary time that followed it seemed that he, too, had stepped beyond into the deep land of the shadow.

Even Wilkins, once he reported at the House of the Sevens, disappeared completely. He left no message, no word whatever. I had nothing but the cycle of my thoughts and broodings. Roselle, Witherspoon, the Master, Wilkins; all the actors in this mystery had been engulfed and had left me waiting.

Where were they? What were they doing? When would they call me? And would they? These were the questions that I kept repeating. I who had grown up in the case from the beginning knew not a point to turn to.

Through weeks and months of dreary waiting I looked out at the skies through

my office-window with vain conjectures. At night, in dead of silence, I would awaken and lie for hours a-thinking.

What of them? Where were they? Was the girl really in no danger? She might be dead. Crime, murder, arson; anything might happen.

At times I felt a clutching at my throat, as if a hand were gripping. In the dead of night, in the brooding silence I was answered with apprehension. I could see all dire disasters. Roselle: worn, torn, tattered, disgraced forever; a plaything. Oh, for some word or message! But not a token.

Two years went by. Even Clara, saddened, spoke no more of her pretty cousin. The little ones gradually forgot their Aunt "Woselle." Though we had hope and a great confidence in the Master, the balm of time settled us into resignation. We hoped, we prayed, but it appeared all useless.

The Master was an old man; he might have died. Though I made inquiries at his office, I learned nothing. They knew not, so they said, where he had gone. The orders he had given had been strict and certain—not to seek him. In the fulness of time, he had assured them, he would return. It was essential that he work in secret.

And Wilkins? He had come, had found sealed orders, and had departed, they knew not whither. That was all. Our prayers were hopeless.

But one morning in the spring-time, when the air was all full of life and sunshine, when the birds swelled out their little throats with the song of matings, when even my mind, accustomed as it was to soberness and thinking, was rippled with the breath of life awaking—we received a message.

In an idle moment I was sitting by the open window, drowsy with the day's contentment, when my phone rang. I picked up the receiver. It was Clara. She seemed excited.

"Oh, Walter!" she called. "Walter! Walter! Is this you? Oh, I have the greatest news! I can hardly tell you! Do you hear me? The greatest news! Oh, dear!"

"What is it, Clara? Why so excited? It must be news indeed. What is it?"

"Oh," she returned, "I could cry! Oh, Walter! It is from Roselle!"

From Roselle! My heart gave a sudden lurching. I caught my breath at the suddenness of the word. What—what had happened? With the fear and dread that clutched me I could scarcely answer.

"Roselle? What is it, Clara? What has happened?"

"Oh," came the answer, "I can't tell you. You must see it."

What was it? With a bound I was out of the building, into the car and speeding over the streets of our little city. For a sober staid, strict banker and law-abiding citizen I am afraid I cut a pretty figure with my speeding.

On the driveway my wife ran out to meet me. In her hands she held a paper. As I leaped from the car, her arms about me, her tears and laughter, told me that she had glad tidings.

"Oh," she cried, "Roselle is alive and is happy! It is wonderful. Just as the Master told us; past all understanding. She has written to us about it—about him, the wonderful being who is her husband.

"He is kind to her; he loves her. She says everything; that he is an angel; that he is—he is—she doesn't know what! She says so much in her letter that I cannot tell you. She tells me to give her Walter a kiss from his Roselle."

She kissed me. It was news indeed, glad tidings that made me feel ten years younger. She kissed me for Roselle. In the eagerness of my spirit I felt that the dear girl was near me.

"There, there," I exclaimed, unclasping her arms. "Let us go into the house and read the letter."

A moment later we were in the seclusion of our library: I in the great arm-chair, and my wife with the manuscript in her lap. It was not a letter at all, but a book. There must have been a hundred pages. Here it is:

CHAPTER XVIII

A LETTER FROM ROSELLE

Paris, France, June, 1900.

To Walter and Clara.

My dear ones:

This is a letter from your long-lost girly who was so foolish as to fall in love and to run away like a spirit in the night-time.

You remember? It seems so long ago. Ages, ages; millions of years away. I can scarce recall it. It is like the ending of another life that I hardly remember: a flitting, a dream, an incident of some great slumber.

You remember? Yes, so do I. But it is like a dream, so much has happened.

Your little Roselle is in another world entirely. Her ways are the ways of fairies, and her joys the pleasures of a princess.

As I write this letter, for instance, I have wealth about me, diamonds, sapphires, rubies, jewels of the ages scattered about my desk as playthings. Servants, black as ebon, stalk through my palace. My little foot might topple over a kingdom. I am gossamer and delicate and queen over more than an empire. I am beautiful, proud, rich and happy. No girl, no princess, no daughter of man since time first started has had such a life as mine is.

When I was a child you will remember how I talked of the fairies. I would marry a real Prince Charming and rule in a fairy kingdom. I would have gold and jewels and a life of sunshine; my voice would be like the music, and my love would be undying; I would be a fairy princess and rule with love forever, among the flowers and dew-drops.

It was not a childish fancy. It has all come true. I have been wafted to an enchanted kingdom. I hold scepter over the greatest of men, who, by his will, if he but would, could sway the hosts of the nations. Such is your Roselle.

This reads like the wildest fancy. I have just reread it. It sounds disordered; the writing and the boasting of a mind entangled. But it is true; all true.

You remember George Witherspoon—what you thought him? You called him the Rebel Soul. Remember?

I can see that room yet, as we sat there. Clara, Walter, and the Master, and your poor Roselle.

At the time I could not understand you. I was drawn, fascinated by your description, by his peril, by his beauty, by his isolation. It caught me like the breath of fire-flame, and consumed me. I was romantic, adventurous and girl enough to admire just such a hero. I confessed it. I begged his photograph, was dramatic and very foolish. I ran up to my room in a flood of passion. I was but a maiden.

But that night he came. Remember? I met him at the hallway.

Clara, you will never understand it. Nor will I. He had but to say one word—"Roselle"—and I was his forever. Against all reason, against all my training, against all rules and strict conventions, he had but to say a single word and he had won me.

You recalled what followed. How can you ever forget it? The night of the ball, how he robbed poor Walter and the struggle in the ballroom! Remember the words of the Master when he assisted us to the car. I can hear them yet: "Love, be faithful, be devoted."

And at home. Your elation at what had happened. Walter's statement that the man had robbed him; that George Witherspoon was the King of Thieves; my scorn and anger, my passion and flooded answer.

Ah, Clara! If you only knew what I know; and if only I knew the truth. Walter was right. My husband is the King of Thieves. Yes, but he is much more. There is something about him superior; like no man living, I might almost say uncanny.

There is so much that I must tell you.

We were married on the night I left you. He was all kindness and solicitude. I know he loved me. And he has done so ever since.

There is no detail, no little thing too trivial, no tenderness whatever that he overlooks in his affection. No man ever so loved a woman. His devotion is pure, noble, chaste and manly. I am telling you this because I know the perfectly natural fears that you have harbored. Your Roselle is safe, is in hands that love her, and there is nothing in the world that she cannot have when she wishes.

Just the same, I wish to make confession: The man I love, this being, I would that I could understand him. He is like no other man of the past or present; he is beautiful, magnificent, a genius, a mind transcendent and illusive. Whether language, art, music, science, or mechanics, he is the master. He has but to desire a thing to possess it. Did I not love him, were he not so beautiful, were he not so superior and magnetic, I might fear him. As it is I worship him; I idolize him; I would willingly be his slave if he so willed.

At first he was to me only as a lover; I was but a girl; I had eyes but for his body, his splendid features, his blue eyes, his beauty. His smile was warmer than the sunshine. I knew only his magnificent youth, his vigor and his love. The strange stories I had heard of the Rebel Soul were speedily forgotten; he was my husband.

We journeyed about on our honeymoon, much as others do.

We visited many and far places. We

circled all the States and traveled over South America. I believe that no woman was ever half so happy. He worshiped me, saw to my every pleasure, and had for me the tenderest of devotion. They were months of fun and frolic and of love.

At length we arrived at San Francisco and took ship for Asia. It was there that I had the first manifestation of what I had married.

WE WERE in Peking. We had journeyed up through China, visiting quaint cities full of dirty coolies, filth, mandarins, and little ladies, things that to me, accustomed to a clean, healthy western civilization, were strange and exotic. Their funny little houses, their bridges, their roads, canals, and gardens; everything was so different. I was delighted and often clapped my hands in wonder.

But by the time we had been in the big city a few things began to pall on me. There was something about the country, for all its beauty, that was depressing. After a week of sight-seeing I felt stifled. A sort of reaction came upon me. I wanted the air of another country, real human beings like myself, and a civilization that was open. I spoke to George.

"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow we shall go. To-night I expect a visitor."

"American?" I asked.

"No, Chinese. One of the greatest men in China; or for that matter in the world; the Wise Man of the East."

"How interesting!" I exclaimed. "And I suppose he is old, very old, yellow, wrinkled and very dirty."

He laughed.

"He is old, very old, yellow and wrinkled," he repeated, "but is not dirty. He is the wisest man of the Chinese Empire; all the learning of the untold centuries he has seeped and sifted; he is the repository of unknown wisdoms. There are many things that he knows that would stagger our western scholars. To-night he will come to see me."

"Really!" I exclaimed. "I should like to see him!"

"You may."

Sure enough that night a little old man came to our hotel and was closeted for several hours with my husband. I did not get a good look at his features, when he arrived, but I had an instinctive feeling of immense age and of a certain majesty of bearing. He had his hands crossed before him and lost in his great loose sleeves, and he was saying something in his uncouth language, which sounds much as it looks—like hen's tracks.

I remember this much: He stepped into a room and bowed solemnly; then fell on his knees on the polished floor and kowtowed to my husband. Such an obeisance he might have made before an idol. It was strange; and to a foreign devil! I looked at my husband.

There was a strange expression on his face, of power, immensity and a set intensity that I had never seen before; and at the same time it was mixed with not a little contempt. He laughed gently; an amused smile, derisive. Suddenly he reached over, touched the other and motioned him to a seat. In a moment they were talking.

The door was open, and as George made no attempt at secrecy I stepped a little closer. They were conversing in Chinese. Chinese! I had no idea that my husband understood it or could speak it, much less that he was fluent. I was astonished.

But of course that made me only the more eager. The moment I realized that they were talking a foreign tongue, I was determined to understand them. I called one of my Chinese servants, who had a good command of pidgin, and asked him to listen. But he shook his head.

"No, savvy," he said, "talkum dead man; talkum Chinese allee same dead million years. Velly smart man."

Just then he glanced in. He saw the old man sitting with my husband. He turned pale and drew away. He was terribly frightened.

"What is it?" I asked.

He pointed with his finger.

"Wise man! Chinee boy; maybe allee same now dead boy."

With that, before I could question further, he glided away from me, like a startled ghost.

It was a little spooklike. But George was in the next room, and so, of course, I had not a thing to fear. In fact, I was not a little amused at the ridiculous terror that the poor child entertained for this wizened, old, wise man. These Chinese are so exceedingly superstitious. Nevertheless, it flavored not a little the interview which I was to have a short while later.

When George had finished he conducted the old gentlemen to my apartment. I was but a girl, and accustomed to the material. I liked good looks. This man

did not have them. He was so old that the only thing that seemed to cling to his bones was a determination to be of the living. His face was diminished almost to nothing; shrunken, tied up in a knot; I have only a vague impression that he possessed features; a floating recollection, almost doubtful, that he had a mouth and nostrils.

Then I looked into his eyes. He bowed, and as his silk-gowned figure, all bespangled with flowers and dragons, bent before me, I had the feeling that here was not age and ugliness, but something that might live forever. His black eyes were intent and mellow, and of such a luster and of such an absorption that you saw not a thing else. It was like looking into the sunset, into the western sea at evening, when the gates are opened, and you peer straight into the unknown mystery of your Creator. There was wisdom all concentrated, living, vital and life filling. I had seen much wisdom both in books and person, but this is the first time that I had ever beheld it, as it were, personified. I could not restrain an exclamation.

"Ah!" He spoke in the purest English. "My lord has spoken; he has told me that his flower, his beautiful wife, would speak to the poor old wise man."

I was confused; not only at his bearing and his command of my own tongue, but at myself and what I was supposed to say. I had thought that he was a mere superstitious puppet, and that he could not understand me. I was prepared for giving him an inspection, passing him over with a laugh perhaps, and sending him on his way. But he was not mere mummery. I could only murmur:

"You have known my husband long?"

"Ah, madam, for many years. And his father before him. A wonderful, splendid being. A creature that none on the earth can understand, except we wise men. You are truly fortunate in such a husband."

I laughed. "Yes, indeed. He is the best boy living. Big, strong, handsome, loving." I cuddled myself up on my couch. "Just the bestest husband that ever was," in girlish accents.

He looked at me in wonder; it seemed to me that in those mellow depths was a startled question; George had left the room.

"Ah," he said, "she is like the maiden: she beholds only the carnal flesh and beauty, lives for the pleasure, the soul she sees not. Do you know, madam," he asked, "do you know your husband?"

It was such a foolish question. Know my husband!

"Why," I laughed, "my dear doctor! I don't know your title; but as all smart men must be doctors, I suppose you are doctor of something. My husband is a man—"

But he interrupted here; there was a thing in his eyes that was tenderness and pity.

"Your husband is not a man. Rather is he a solution." He smiled, and spoke with the metaphore of the Flowery Kingdom. "Ah, my flower, your husband is as the sun that is arisen: he is the light that should feed with its warmth and gladness; that should set all the world aglow. He is golden; he is burning with the sunshine."

I clapped my hands; I am afraid that I was silly.

"You mean that he is handsome!"

"I mean," he said, bowing, "that he is a god, or almost so. He is what the wise men of the earth have looked for."

But just then came my husband. Just as I was being whetted to curiosity and was about to derive some real amusement from this strange old wise man, George returned.

The conversation shifted suddenly, and after a little commonplace the old man was gone. Next day we set out for Russia.

CHAPTER XIX

A MAN OF WONDERFUL POWER

THE words of the aged Chinese might have made some impression upon me had they not seemed so funny. For so they struck me. Though I was impressed by his wonderful personality, and the plain manifestations of his wisdom, there was that in his speech that was plainly mystic.

I was a girl, and had been reared west of Chicago, and was accustomed to the daylight. He had said that my husband was a god or something, and it tickled my fancy. Anyway, to me at least, George Witherspoon was a god. Like a true little wife I told him of it, and he listened.

"You are my god at least," I said in petting comment.

He laughed with great amusement.

"Did he tell you this? And a wise man? There is nothing on earth so foolish as wise men. Sometimes they remind me of

a lot of puppies, they are so simple."

"But, George," I exclaimed, "you yourself called him so; you appeared honored by his visit."

He patted me on the cheek.

"Little girl," he said, "you must not concern yourself with wisdom. What has beauty to do with learning? You have something that is worth more a million times than all our science. Compared to youth, beauty and pleasure all the accumulations of our wise men are not worth a false farthing. You have youth, beauty, love; you are in the paradise of lifetime. Forget their wisdom."

He kissed me and in his strong, magnificent arms I knew he was telling the truth. There is nothing but love to live for, and once that is gone life is merely canker.

But it chanced that a few days later I had plenty of food for reflection. In fact, it almost frightened me. It brought back to me, in spite of my husband's fondness, the words of the strange, old, wise man.

We were in Siberia, on the long road that leads into Russia. We had stopped at a little station. What it was that delayed us I have no way of telling. On the platform a crowd of men was passing to and fro, officers and civilians.

We had alighted for a little air, and to stretch from our limbs the weariness of travel. As we passed among the crowd I could not, as a girl, but admire the all-resplendent officers, their carriage perfect, but for all that haughty. I spoke to my husband.

"Yes," he said, "they are pretty. But that is all—mere things dressed up. They are the opera of the civilization through which we are now passing. They have souls of dogs and are sowing the seeds of the revolution that will consume them."

"But," I opposed, "they are pretty, for all that."

"Yes, beautiful," he answered with pregnant sarcasm.

Just then a little old man ran out of the station, his hands full of paper, and after looking up and down stepped up before one of the officers who judging from the decorations on his breast, must have been of great consequence. The little man spread out a paper and gesticulated. They were speaking Russian and so I, of course, could not understand them. But it was evident from the official's attitude, his scorn and anger, that the little man did not please him. His lip curled with scorn and contempt; the civilian was imploring.

Then suddenly something happened. The officer uttered an oath, made a movement, and a flash cleaved through the air. The old man threw his arms above his head as a vain protection. But it was useless—the sword cut through the arm. The man fell senseless, a heap, broken and maimed, upon the platform.

It happened just that suddenly; it was so incredible that I could scarce believe it. I had all my life been reared on points of honor. I had always considered nobility as the very essence of the finer things in mankind. The scene cut through my heart like a cold steel twisting. It was dreadful.

But that was not all. The great man looked down at his work in calm satisfaction. He lifted up his foot and with a movement turned the old man over. Then deliberately and contemptuously he spat upon the face.

I expected the officers to spring upon him. But not so. They were loud with guffaws and congratulating laughter. It appeared to amuse them much as the killing of a dog.

But there were others: workmen, peasants, or prisoners, or whatever they were in that far-off corner of the globe. I could see their looks of furtive hatred. They said nothing; but there was that about them which was deadly. I was but a girl, but I understood it.

My husband's lip curled.

"And they call themselves human," he scorned. "Human beings. And they say they have souls! So have the rats!"

I shuddered; the sight of that old man writhing, his arm cut and the blood, turned me sick almost to fainting.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "the brute! The great inhuman coward! He should be punished. His own arm should be crushed and broken even as the other."

As I spoke I looked up at my husband. He was cold and cynical; there was that in his face that I had never seen before.

"You wish it," he said coldly. "Then so be it. He is as good as done for."

Perhaps the official heard us talking. I had no idea that he was conversant with English; I had not stopped to consider that a great many of these men, however brutal, have splendid educations. But such must have been the case, for he turned toward us, his laugh tossing forth his contempt.

Suddenly he started forward. Everybody made a lane for his greatness. All but my husband. He stood, calm, still, motionless, awaiting the giant that was stalking toward him. The Russian was aflame with anger. It was manifest that he had been drinking. I shook with terror.

"What do you mean?" he bellowed.

George never budged. I can see him yet as he stood before that bulk that towered above him. His blue eyes were cold, freezing with untold derision. Then he spoke; every word barbed with taunting.

"I mean," he said slowly, watching the words seep in, "that the price of cheese has gone up two cents in Denmark."

For an instant the other was incredulous, doubtful, astounded at my husband's audacity, his slow mind blinking the interpretation. Then he grasped it. His sword leaped from the scabbard. It was murder.

George was as cool as an iceberg; his arms were folded, his laugh even more derisive. As the weapon flashed into the air he spoke sharply; his words were like silver toning, ringing like a bell; imperative, incisive.

"Come," he exclaimed, "put up your plaything. It might burn you."

It was incredible. That Russian gave a scream of terror; his hand relaxed from the weapon, and the blade fell clanging to the platform. Then confusion, the giant holding one hand in the other and writhing about in agony. Across the palm was a mark much as though a white-hot iron had seared it.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "what did you do? What happened? What was it?"

George laughed.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all; it was merely too hot to handle. Come, Roselle, we had better get back to our carriage."

That ended that part. A short time later the train was under way, and we were again on our way toward European Russia.

MOST of the officers who had stood upon the platform and who had been so hilariously delighted at the play at murder were passengers. Among them was the ruffian. By cautious investigation I discovered that he was a duke of something—there are so many dukes in Russia that I don't remember just what it was—he was of a powerful family and a person of tremendous importance in this distant corner of the empire. Just now he and his suite were on a journey to Moscow.

When I learned this I had new fears for my husband. I dreaded the revenge that this man might take upon him. Though George was so manifestly his master in personality, there were devious and unlimited means that he could employ for vengeance. I was afraid.

But again I was mistaken. The fellow had a wholesome dread, almost a superstition, for the one who had smitten him. Whenever he encountered George he eyed him furtively and carefully avoided him.

His hand was bandaged. He appeared puzzled with timidity and fear. The most that he cared for apparently was to be let alone. And it was strange, too, for so large a man, who would easily have made two of my husband.

From then on the atmosphere of the journey was heavy with doubt and uncertainty. All the officers, all the passengers who had witnessed the performance, kept their eyes upon him. We were in a superstitious country; and I am sure there were whisperings on that train that boded us no great good fortune.

George? He never noticed it. He was cheery, calm and calculating as ever. Wherever he moved he had his way and compelled them to join in with his laughter. There was something forceful and magnetic about his every action. When he talked they hung upon his slightest syllable. He seemed to be driving them, even against their wills, into admiration.

This is one thing that I have ever noticed about my husband. Apparently not a thing on earth has any power to deny him the slightest will or action, his personality is suffusing; and he absorbs.

We drew near to the mountains; we were four days out; the air was growing colder, lighter and thinner. As we entered the foot-hills we ran into a little town that must have marked a division. For a place of its size it was full of traffic, and train upon train of freight-cars were waiting at the sidings.

A slight snow had fallen, which, mixed with the cinders fallen from the cars and slipping from the fences, gave the scene a wet and mottled aspect.

Just before we reached the station our train slowed down, stopped and waited; then, after a bit, after many jerks and joltings, we were backed into a switch.

It was undoubtedly part of the schedule that we should be side-tracked for some express that was approaching. The time wore on into minutes.

At length there was some impatience. A few of the officers, who apparently were accustomed to do just about as they pleased, stepped out upon the tracks. Some started for the depot. I was seated on the inner seat, but I could just see what was occurring.

George was by the window chewing gum, watching with contented unconcern the trivial incidents that were attendant upon our arrival. Trains were moving slowly, freight engines puffing, snorting, moving to and fro.

Just then I beheld our giant officer stepping from the train. He was calling to some companions who were a bit before him. A freight-engine was coming up the track between them. He called and the others halted, waiting.

The engine was almost up to them. The ground was slushy and covered with a treacherous, slippery snowfall. For a man who was splendidly quick and nimble it was possible to leap across ahead of the engine; apparently the Russian considered himself just the person. He cast a quick look up and down and started running across at right angles. He was alert and active; it seemed that he would make it. I had seen the thing done a thousand times before.

But this was one of the times that was over a thousand. The ground was snow-covered and very slippery. At the very center he stumbled and fell face downward. The steel monster was not twenty feet away.

The man realized his danger. With a quick, marvelous movement that proclaimed his athletic training, he somersaulted backward. Had it been entirely successful he would not have saved himself by more than a hair's breadth.

But it was not. Simultaneously with the movement one hand had become entangled in a switch, a piece of steel, or some third accessory between the tracks, and was held in a viselike gripping.

It was one of those inexorable seconds of fate; though his body was safe, his arm was neatly stretched across that band of steel as a neck extended for execution. The engine was not six feet away, moving slowly. The man fought and struggled, his face purple with retributive terror. It seemed that he would pull the arm out of the socket.

I screamed. At the same time I have a flitting recollection of my husband by the window, chewing gum, laughing softly.

The engine passed on and over; the limb was cut as a piece of paper. The man rolled senseless; the macerated stump held uppermost, as if to proclaim that the work was over.

And then, as if to emphasize a strange fate's sarcasm, the engine paused not two feet farther. In response to the engineer's frantic endeavors it stopped to deadness. The trainmen leaped out and ran to the man's assistance.

They were terror-stricken; the man's uniform and his importance proclaimed the consequence impending. With tumultuous haste and fear they tumbled him into the cab and rushed with him ahead of us into the depot.

To Be Continued

Editor's Note

ROSELLE'S letter to Mrs. Warren will be continued in the November issue of this magazine which will be at your dealer's on September 15th.

This remarkable epistle, describing as it does the supernatural powers of George Witherspoon, is really the crux of the whole story.

You will read about the adventurous tour through continental Europe; of Russia, where George was a prince, of Germany, where he became a baron, and a pet of the Kaiser. . . . All intensely exciting.

Please ask your dealer now to hold a copy of this November issue for you. This story is very popular and your dealer is cooperating in the war effort by ordering no more copies than he actually needs. Thank you.

The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries,
280 Broadway, New York City.

IN FANTASY'S REALM

Several months ago I began reading A. Merritt's "The Metal Monster." I was infinitely thrilled to discover that at last here was something which blended the horrible and the fantastic into an emotion of fearful beauty, of infinitely horrible pleasantness—an emotion which words can hardly describe so inefficient is material language when something ultra-natural is under discussion.

Since that first issue I have obtained others, and I find every one of these unique stories enchantingly fascinating, hypnotically absorbing, and thrilling with the thrill that burns deep into the soul, never to be forgotten throughout all eternity.

All of the stories I have read so far, and especially Merritt's superbly engrossing tales, have absorbed me body and soul and swept me out of the material world into the realm of fantasy which is and yet is not for many long and beautifully sorrowful hours.

The writers whom you publish are truly the greatest artists of the art. All of them, but Merritt especially, write in that manner which is unique, unusual, forceful and powerfully compelling. One might even say, they write hypnotically.

Of all the stories I have read, I must give Merritt's "The Metal Monster" first place, with Lovecraft's "Colour Out of Space" a closed second. Stevens' "Claimed" occupies third place, followed in order by "The Citadel of Fear," "The Snake Mother," "Beyond the Great Oblivion," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," and "Venus or Earth?"

Give us more stories by Merritt, and if you count suggestions from readers, please remember C. L. Moore and Robert E. Howard. In my opinion Otis Adelbert Kline's "Thing of a Thousand Shapes" and Sidney Harler's "The Vampire" could well grace the pages of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES.

I am truly surprised that ancient Atlantis has been so ignored by the authors of horror-fantasy. Please seek for us, the reading public, one of those superb tales of Atlantis which I know must be lying hidden away in some dark, secluded corner somewhere.

Varos Thorthun.

Crystal City,
Missouri.

WORD FROM BRITAIN

I've yet to see in the readers' columns of F.F.M. a letter from any other Britisher than Frank Edward Arnold. This may or may not be due to the fact that I don't happen to have all the issues of F.F.M. thus far published. I would like to point out that as the Science-Fiction Association was suspended at the outbreak of war Arnold's remarks cannot be said to reflect the views of any large number of its members—if indeed they reflect the views of anyone other than Arnold himself.

In his letter in your October, 1941 issue, he asks you to think of us as a "proud and upright people with blood in our eye and vengeance in our hearts"; and another time he prates of building a new world. Are these three sentiments, pride, anger and vengeance—which are largely responsible for the present conflict—to be the cornerstones of Arnold's new world? If so, I want no part of it.

Such issues of your mag as I've seen have been excellent.

If any American cares to write to me he may be sure of an answer.

Jack Gibson.

7 Belmont Rd.,
Parkstone, Dorset,
England.

IN DEMAND

Just recently I took a poll of the letters in your magazine and found that the following stories were in demand at least three times:

The Ship of Ishtar, 13; The Rest of the Palos Triology, 21; Skylark Series, 6; Into the Infinite, 19; Planet of Peril, 7; The Man Who Mastered Time, 7; Queen of Life, 8; After a Million Years, 7; Treasures of Tantalus, 8; The Planeteer, 8; The Golden Blight, 9; Man in the Moon, 4; Out of the Moon, 5; King of Conserve Island, 3; Conquest of the Moon, 6; Conquest of Mars, 7; The Sea Demons, 3; The Empire of the Air, 7; Polaris Trilogy, 8; The Fatal Gift, 5; The Flying Legion, 5; The Second Deluge, 3; Phantom In the Rainbow, 4; The Blue Barbarians, 3; Prince of Peril, 5; The Fire People, 3.

I think that your magazine is the best on the market today and more than worth the price.

Of the stories you have printed, the ones that appealed to me the greatest were the ones by G. A. England. Here's my vote for all of his stories.

As for A. Merritt, well he's the master of them all, except perhaps Hall and England. Please rush us "Ship of Ishtar." And when do we get the Complete Moon Pool Series?

"Burn, Witch, Burn!" is in my opinion one of Merritt's least important jobs. No superlative and gorgeous places. No extraordinary vocabulary.

Why not publish your mag bi-weekly? It is bound to sell.

Well, here's to a great mag, and don't forget "The Ship of Ishtar."

Acree Brown.

213 W. Indiana St.,
Evansville, Indiana.

FIRST LETTER

This is my first letter to you. I think your magazine is the best fantastic magazine on the market. I read my first copy in 1941. I was looking for something new in the line of fantasy and happened on your mag. It contained "The Face in the Abyss," the best fantasy I've ever had the luck to read. Merritt's work is superb.

I looked forward eagerly for the sequel, "The Snake Mother," and found it even better than the "Face." "The Blind Spot" holds a high place in anyone's fantasy collection.

I've read many other fantastic magazines, but read them now only as a fill in between your issues. I have been hoping for your magazine to become a monthly, and so it is. Many thanks.

In the July copy, "Polaris—of the Snows," was out of the old run of fantasy. Can you give me a short story of its author? I have already been acquainted with Stevens' stories and his "Serapion" was a good piece of work.

A few words for Finlay, he gets better every issue.

C. M. BEARDEN.

A. B. I. S.,
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

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AUGUST COVER BEST YET

I am writing this letter to tell you how much I like your magazine, F.F.M. (if it is possible).

I have just obtained the latest issue, "Creep, Shadow!" It promises to be another of Merritt's greatest. The cover was the best yet. The only other competitors for this honor are the covers for "Burn, Witch, Burn!" and "Palos of the Dog Star Pack." Finlay is the best cover artist I have yet seen. Keep him! His inside illustrations are excellent if they are with the right type of story. Have him illustrate all of Merritt's coming novels. They're the only stories that can do his work justice.

Paul can have most of the rest. His pictures are very good too, but they go best with types of stories like "The Radio" Series, "The Palos" Series, and "The Polaris" set. His illustrations just aren't fantastic and mysterious enough to do Merritt justice, but he's still good.

I am very pleased to see you have answered the many fans' request for more and larger illustrations. I quote the words of Earl Dolan ("Heck, now what can we fans write in and complain about!"). Keep up the swell work.

My favorite story so far is of course one of Merritt's, "Burn, Witch, Burn!" That is of the ones you have published. The favorite of all is "Seven Footprints to Satan," still one of Merritt's.

I am anxiously awaiting the sequels to "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," and "Polaris—of the Snows." This is my only complaint.

The stories I feel many others besides myself would like published are:

Merritt—Seven Footprints to Satan; The Ship of Ishtar; The Moon Pool (republication); The Conquest of the Moon Pool (republication).

Cummings—Brigands of the Moon; Tama, Princess of Mercury; Tama of the Light Country; The Sea Girl.

Kline—The Prince of Peril; The Planet of Peril; Maza of the Moon.

Farley—Caves of Ocean; Radio Series (Remainder).

There is only one thing I miss in F.F.M., that is an Editor's page. But in a magazine such as this I feel that it is not necessarily needed since each story is fairly well known and explanation and comments are hardly needed.

I greatly enjoy the "Reader's Viewpoint" section. It gives us readers a chance to exchange opinions and information.

I have yet to hear of a complaint as to F.F.M.'s new price. It is easily worth it. I would pay twice that for it if necessary. The smooth edges are also highly welcomed.

Before closing I would like to say that my files are incomplete in many places. I would greatly appreciate it if other F.F.M. fans who have extra copies of the following would write me, telling me the price you want for the magazines.

F.F.M.: Oct., 1939; Jan., 1940; Feb., 1940; April-Aug., 1940; Dec., 1940; Feb., 1941.

Fantastic Novels: July, 1940; Nov., 1940. I have only the Dec. 1941 issue in duplica-

tion which I will gladly trade for issues missing in my collection.

F.F.M. has been my favorite magazine since I bought my first issue, Dec. 1941. May it continue for a great many years.

ROBERT CASARI.

2401 E. ST.,
LINCOLN, NEBR.

LIST OF OLD-TIMERS

Put "Pilliwink," "The Person from the Pyramids," "The Mastodon Milkman," "The Brain Blight," "The House of Sorcery," and "Adrift in the Unknown" in the list for republication. I am very much disappointed that none of the old timers have called for these yet in The Readers' Viewpoint. Oh, my, am I forgetful—put "The Castle on the Crag" somewhere near the front on the above list!

What's holding up "The Planeteer" and "The King of Conserve Island"? You haven't run Flint in about a year or more now. Keep Burroughs out and don't run "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" again. Everybody has had a chance at that one—give us a shot at some of the others we have waited for so long.

M. SGT. T. I. SAARELA.

DET. 908TH Q. M. Co., AVN.
(SVCE.)
AAF GLIDER SCHOOL,
AMARILLO, TEXAS.

"SERAPION" GREAT STORY

I have just finished reading the July F.F.M. The story "Serapion" is what made me decide to write you a letter.

In my opinion it is the best story Francis Stevens ever wrote. I know it impressed me more than any story I have ever read. His composition and manner, and his eloquence surpass anything written by any author yet. His style is something to be talked about in hushed whispers. And this story was perhaps the accomplishment of the greatest efforts he ever put forth.

Your magazine is contributing an immeasurable service to fantasy fandom by reprinting those old masterpieces. What would we do without you?

Add me to your rapidly growing list of readers asking for "The Moon Pool" complete. Would also like to see some Lovecraft.

DAVID MILLER.

306 COLLEGE ST.,
VALDOSTA, GA.

WANTS "THE SKYLARK"

Just another reader who would like to put in his bit of praise for one swell mag. You are doing a very wise thing by reprinting all the old classics. Requests for reprints have been made of science-fiction mags for years, which brings me to the real reason for this letter. I wish you would reprint Smith's famous "Skylark" series.

ROBERT JACKSON.

734 PALM ST.,
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To People who want to write *but can't get started*

Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance?
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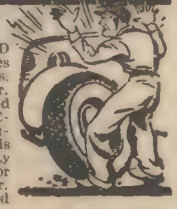

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STILSON FAN

Thanks for printing my letter in the July ish, but my name isn't Ryan, it's Regan.

But let's get on to the stories. "Polaris—of the Snows" and "Serapion" were so darn good you just couldn't rate 'em. If there are any other stories written by Stilson please give us more.

I am a newcomer to S-F and Fantasy, so you see I haven't read any of the old masterpieces, only the ones your mag puts out, and I can't thank you enough for bringing back these old favorites.

Twenty-five cents for your mag now—I guess it's worth it to have trimmed edges, more pages, and more pics, and longer stories.

Is there any chance of getting Bok and Magarian? Magarian is as good as Finlay if not better.

Cover this July ish superb. Never let go of Finlay. Paul was, as usual, excellent.

Congrats on going monthly.

THOMAS REGAN, JR.

138 TOWNSEND ST.,
NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

WANTS PAUL COVERS

"Creep, Shadow!" Boy, was that good? Finlay's pic on page 49 was a masterpiece. I have just discovered F.F.M. I don't know how you do it. You have the very best staff artists; you print the best stories, too.

How about "Into the Infinite," "The Prince of Peril," "The Planet of Peril," some of Serviss's long novels, and Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar"? I am glad you have gone monthly. Let Paul do a few covers.

And add me to the number of readers who want the Moon Pool yarns reprinted again.

EUGENE SETCHELL.

119 E. STATE ST.,
ALGOMA, IOWA.

FINLAY OUTSHINES HIMSELF

The most striking thing about the August issue of F.F.M. was the artwork of Virgil Finlay. It is obvious that he outdid himself. He seems to get better with each succeeding month; his drawings this time outshine nearly all of what he has produced heretofore. The variation of technique is intriguing. As for the cover—very beautiful; the color is perfect. The use of black as a background is also very appropriate.

The use of numerous interiors, regularly spaced, is very much appreciated, believe me. Finlay makes a story live!

I am glad to see Cummings' "A Brand New World" published. Others that I would like to see include: E. E. Smith's "Skylark" stories; Victor Rousseau's fantastic yarns; more of H. P. Lovecraft's classics; "The Planeteer" by Homer Eon Flint; and tales by O. A. Kline and Murray Leinster.

Publication of Smith's stories would cause a sensation!!!

EDWARD C. CONNOR.

929 BUTLER ST.,
PEORIA, ILL.

5TH MAY, 1942

Congratulations on the improvements in the June issue of F.F.M., just to hand. The trimmed edges, extra pages, and increased number of illustrations merit the new price of 25c. A monthly at last, as well. What more could one ask for? I would, however, like to know when my subscription expires, as its length will be reduced by the new price, etc.

More congratulations on printing "Burn, Witch, Burn!" Merritt is always tops with me. F.F.M. is the top mag., so keep up the good work, and you'll keep on pleasing one sfn. starved British fan at any rate.

Please ask any U.S. fans if they'd care to swap copies of U.S. sfn. pros. for British books, or back issues of our now defunct pro mag. Again, thank you. Success to F.F.M.

J. E. RENNISON.

82 RAMSGREAVE DRIVE,
BLACKBURN, LANCS.
ENGLAND.

MOON METAL: NOVEMBER '39

I'm going to do the title role in the Invisible Man, mister editor. I could call to see you; I could even telephone to you, but I'm going to put my squawk on paper.

Why don't you publish Merritt's "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" complete in a forthcoming issue? Why not publish Farley's "Radio Man" complete also?

Now please tell me when you printed "The Moon Metal," by Garrett P. Serviss.

A. NEVIN MURPHY.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

COPACETIC: FROM THE NAVY

Please permit a sailor an expression for the publication "Famous Fantastic Mysteries." It affords the nation's best medium of "escape" entertainment, and if you are open to suggestions, here's one I'd like to make:

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THE RIGHT FORMULA

Have assiduously read every issue since inception, and with Merritt as pacemaker, F. F. M. tops every magazine of its kind.

Have been an Argosy reader, man and boy. Dimly recall a fantastic in an Argosy issue of the early hundreds called "Ape and the Diamond." Just how good is my memory?

When are "Footprints of Satan," "Ship of Ishtar," to be published?

Pure phantasy is your forte, the Burroughs type alongside of Merritt, Hall, etc., is out of order.

N. ROSENTHAL.

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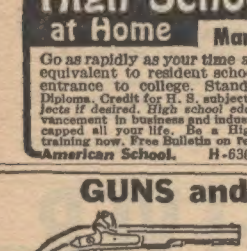

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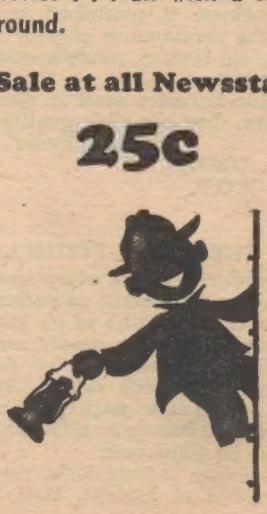

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